

BEING AT THE EDGE OF LANDSCAPE: SENSE OF PLACE AND PEDAGOGY

by

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Abstract

This study is an experiment in landscape art where artists put large pieces of fabric in personally significant places to be marked by the land. Landscape art is a site of power that can challenge embedded assumptions regarding national identity within tensions among local, national, and global scales. This research ruptures the Canadian myth of wilderness nation through the creation of an alternative landscape art that is informed by a theoretical discourse on the threshold as a site of difference and of learning. Inspired by the creative processes of the participating artists, Peter von Tiesenhausen, Pat Beaton, and Robert Dmytruk, I consider pedagogical implications for art education when pedagogy is structured on the powerful premise that learning is an uncertain, relational, and continual process.

Using my understanding of the methodology of a/r/tography, I create and poetically analyze art that offers opportunities for personal reflection into the nature of transformative educational practices. This form of arts-based research is influenced by the notion of assemblage, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari (1984), as well as practices of narrative, action research, and autoethnography, all of which echo the research method of *carrere* (Pinar & Grumet, 1976). Within a/r/tography, image and text are creatively juxtaposed to inspire new understandings about the pedagogical thresholds among my roles of artist, researcher, and teacher. Arguing that social change must begin from a personal awareness of one's tacit values, I posit that a/r/tography can be an educational opening into reflection of such values due to the embodied, personal nature of art-making.

Through a philosophical discussion of subjectivity and community following the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, I take the participants' and my local, significant places as sites from which to reverse the binary of landscape and artist, following an artistic version of deconstruction. From this a/r/tographical inquiry into elements of the land that serve as structural and heuristic supports, I critique the neoliberal subject position within nationalism, education, and landscape art. I draw on understandings of identity as theorized and performed from the premise that it, like learning, is an unpredictable, relational activity of emergence that is always located on the threshold of difference between one person and another. Thus, I examine the educational, ontological, and social importance of what it means to exist within community in the land. In doing so, I raise questions regarding the normative structures of our educational institutions and suggest that social transformation could begin through art practices as a creative form of pedagogy.

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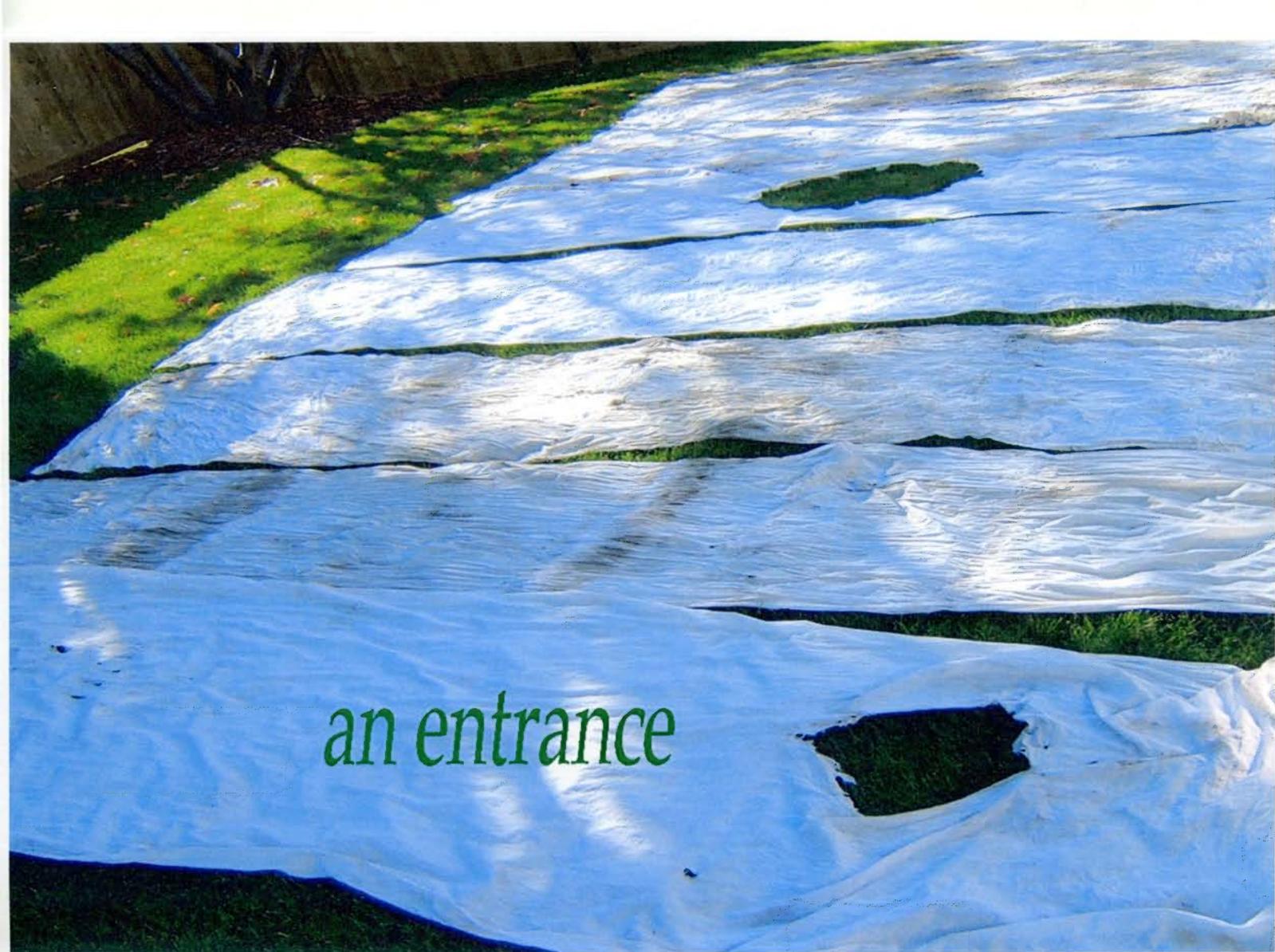
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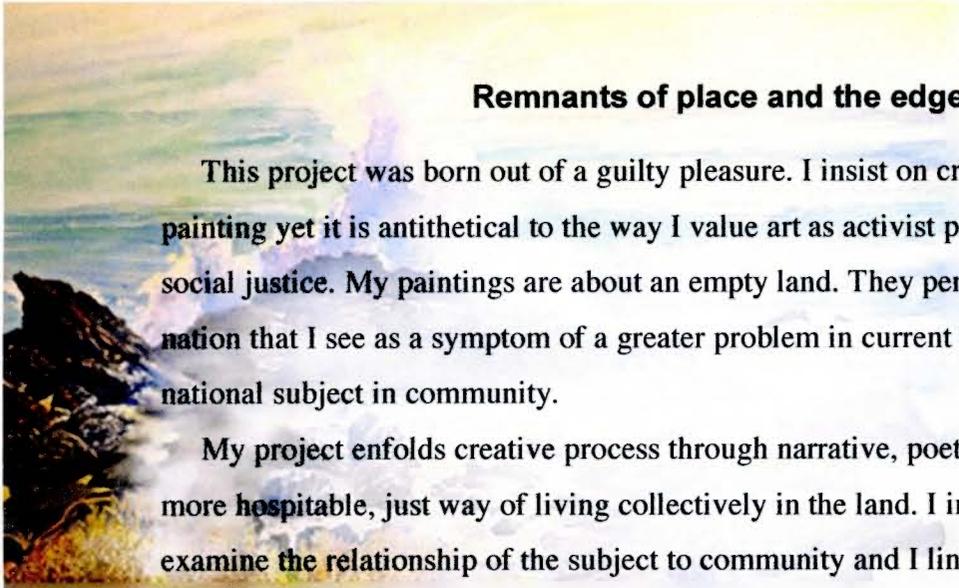
There are a number of other people who have helped me achieve my best work. Firstly, I wish to thank photographer, Monica Emme, whose fine and “curious” eye captured aspects of my work that I did not realize were there. Secondly, for the support and unique perspective on the ideas presented in my work, I extend my sincere thanks to Neeta McMurtry, who spent unmentioned hours pouring over my papers. Thirdly, thanks go as well, to my colleagues at the University of British Columbia and at the University of Alberta whose support and insights were so helpful along the journey.

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an entrance

Unavoidable,
Lure of your wilderness call,
Relation happens.



Remnants of place and the edge of sense

This project was born out of a guilty pleasure. I insist on creating landscape watercolour painting yet it is antithetical to the way I value art as activist practice that works toward greater social justice. My paintings are about an empty land. They perpetuate the myth of the wilderness nation that I see as a symptom of a greater problem in current life: the problem of the modern national subject in community.

My project enfolds creative process through narrative, poetry and image in a search for a more hospitable, just way of living collectively in the land. I investigate two related areas: I examine the relationship of the subject to community and I link this to ways that art and art processes can inspire alternatives to the social imaginary of the wilderness nation. The wilderness trope shapes and reproduces a version of national identity that sees land primarily as a resource, supporting hegemonic social and economic interests in Canada. Through the work of three participating artist/educators, I examine the ways that critical landscape art is pedagogical and can educate us with regard to the subject in community, in the land.

The development of the modern national subject, citizen of the democratic, Western nation is modeled from the autonomous man of the Enlightenment period described in length by Descartes¹. This notion of the free, rational, universal “man” insinuates a separation of mind and body, and consequently a separation from historical context becomes a prerequisite for the neoliberal² subject of present Western nation states (Poster, 1999). This characterization of the subject colours aspects of our lives in many ways. Landscape and often, landscape art infers that we also consider the nature of space, as it is always embedded as an element of the land and of art. Euclidian concepts of space assume the neoliberal subject position with regard to mapping, documenting, and using the land. In education, this position manifests in linear models of curriculum organization and assumptions about developmental stages of learning. By considering an alternative theory of the subject, I rupture these ways of structuring art, land, and education, and open possibilities for social change in local, national, and global communities. This is crucial in our present world of encounters with difference that always hold the potential for violence. We need another educational model or models so that we learn to live within diversity in the land if our planet is to survive. I see this as the greatest and most urgent challenge facing educators. This challenge requires entryways into recognizing and critiquing our tacitly held values. Art about the land can be one such entrance.

I refer to this work in landscape art as an entrance because I am curious if and how my personal, aesthetic process could be a guide for teacher education as a way of approaching social transformation that begins with deep reflection into personal values. Entrance suggests a beginning and every preservice and inservice teacher's entrance into creative process will be different, built upon the frame of her experiences with various artistic forms. With my example, I offer teacher educators pedagogy of threshold, suggesting a powerful opportunity for learning within emergence from familiar, artistic forms to unfamiliar, uncertain ones. My inquiry into the pedagogical potential of a different kind of landscape art that could enhance more traditional art educational practices is influenced by Jean-Luc Nancy's (1991, 2000) disruption of the neoliberal subject and community. With his ideas of an unworkable³ community and a meaningful subject only possible in relation with another, I question Canadian nationalism built on the wilderness myth. Artists concerned with landscape issues have lessons for educators, thus I create an aesthetic inquiry informed by the ideas of three artist/educators, Peter von Tiesenhausen, Pat Beaton, and Robert Dmytruk.

Any research that focuses on social justice and the land must acknowledge the colonial histories of this country. First Nations' political positions and forms of knowledge hold important lessons for us with regard to sharing and living in the land. These perspectives are powerful forces that differ from the dominant, Eurocentric discourse embedded in educational institutions, the art world, and attitudes about the land. I thought deeply about the creation of research that might include these forms of knowledge. In the end, I realized my need to first unpack the white settler position that is my heritage, and that of so many other teachers, teacher educators, and preservice teachers. Reflective work must be continually initiated from within that discourse along with the powerful work of many current artists and researchers who are aboriginal. There are potential thresholds among us that I will explore in future a/r/tographical processes.

Formally, I approach landscape art from a different perspective than my usual paper and canvas supports. I leave my crutch of brush and paint, and search for a material that touches me with familiarity, but is a relative stranger in landscape art. In seeking the "right" materials, my anticipation about the project becomes a strange little glow.

Cotton cloth placed and displaced

I return to the fabric shop, a familiar place from my childhood. I run my hands over silk and rough burlap. I grasp the slickness of rayon in a fist, testing its tendency to wrinkle. Finally I unroll various widths of cotton and I envision my project by draping the fabric over my legs and flicking it out into a billow, a habit from adolescent days when I sewed myself into various fashions. But I cannot leave the silk alone, so fine and soft and shimmering. I imagine it hidden in the ground and smile at the possibilities. However, like many artists, economic limitations force my hand back to the cotton. In the end, its utilitarian history makes it a better choice. Cotton works: not only in the denim overalls of the farmer, in the white aprons of the butcher, in the colour-coded coveralls of the factory worker, but also in the rag paper of the watercolour painter. In another form, cotton works in the creative manuscript and art of this inquiry.

As an experiment toward greater understanding about the influence of place and art on the subject, these artists and I each placed two twelve foot pieces of white cotton outdoors. Each artist selected two places that held personal significance for her/him and left the fabric there. Functioning on one level as a marker for the relationship of artist to place, the cloths remain in these chosen places for six weeks, to be imprinted and conditioned by the elements conducive to each particular environment.

But the cloth does not begin as a place marker. There is no linear order for the meanings woven into this fabric: there is only a shadow of warp and weft. Instead, concurrent images thicken, as suggestions of Christian mythology of the shroud, connotations of a blank canvas, headscarves, bridal gowns, mourning gowns, medical dressings, dishcloths, diapers, bed sheets, and reams of watercolour paper all fight for signifying prominence in my writing. The emptier I make the cloth the fuller it becomes. I bury one of mine. In this act, I attend to “a kind of infinite junction of metaphors, where everything is simultaneous” (Schefer 1997).

I work with the artists, Robert Dmytruk in Edmonton, Alberta, Peter von Tiesenhausen in Demmitt, Alberta, and Pat Beaton in Vancouver, British Columbia, to retrieve the pieces. Discussion about the importance of the placement of the cloths and their retrieval is documented on video. I then return to my home with all of the pieces of fabric that are now marked by various levels of decay and other processes of change. I consider the cloth, video, and conversations and they become the raw materials for aesthetic inquiry within this project. In doing so, the pieces of cloth invoke questions.

1. How can landscape art critique subjectivity and community, offering alternatives to the metaphor of wilderness nation that informs national identity?
2. What is the nature of pedagogy inspired by some artists' creative processes?
3. How can landscape art practices create opportunities for social transformation?

These questions are rolled out and dug up in the earth that sticks to my hands and sticks to the surfaces of the cloth, as my sense of place is smudged into the cloth, staining it with further meanings.

These creations in fabric can be regarded as metaphors for the ephemeral, performative nature of conversation. Like the soft cotton, no longer bound stiffly as watercolour paper, subjectivities that are created between interviewer and interviewee through the speech act are malleable: vulnerable to multiple changes of direction, abrupt turns, unforeseen stops, and variable speeds. The element of the unpredictable unfolds within intentionality when we converse. We choose our words, present our stories, and thus shape who we are, partially through conversation. However, it is through our relationships, in the threshold of our conversations, that chance is at play. In this manner, the unplanned changes to pieces of fabric are like interviews: mixtures of intentionality and surprise.

Also, the diverse places are recorded on the cloths in ways over which we have no obvious control, subject to the conditions of the place. Obviously, issues of control relate to issues of power, and fact that the land has marked the sections of fabric is representative of a reversal of power relations between artist and the land. Rather than artists marking and representing the land in intended ways, the land marks the project of the artist. This reversal is part of a deconstruction of the text of landscape art that exposes the ways we make assumptions about the power invested in the land and through the land. While this metaphor of the land making art is whimsical and requires a leap into a fictional, anthropomorphizing world, I use it as a central metaphor for work on the cloth to emphasize the ubiquitous nature of power relations. Perceptions of control always hover at the edge of uncertainty.

The cloth placed in the land is also a metaphor for an inquiry that is uncertain, open-ended, and emergent. This kind of artistic and educational activity is a form of theorizing through materials and places as research. It is a very different process than a linear practice whereby structure is outlined and planned from the beginning. While more uncomfortable than processes that foster highly structured research from beginning to finish, learning that evolves from

aesthetic inquiry that is located in the place of uncertainty is emotionally and intellectually invigorating. It suggests a kind of learning based upon an emergent subject rather than upon a fully formed one.

Pat: Uncertainty is uncomfortable and freaky and you grind your teeth and do lots of things. But that's where you learn and you have to make yourself go into those places.

Interview #1

The processes that the artist/educators represented in this study share are poignant examples of learning from places of uncertainty. By investigating the layers of meaning, and the flows of power buried in and around relationships with the land, insights into ways that these artists make meaning may help teachers develop pedagogies that are relevant for contemporary experiences of students. I seek a pedagogy that begins from uncertainty. This is a politically significant move. Giroux (2005, pp. 74-75) notes the pedagogical and the political alignment within uncertainty.

Democracy as a promise...is neither a blueprint for the future nor a form of social engineering, but a belief that different futures are possible. For Derrida this position rejects a politics of certainty and holds open matters of contingency, context, and indeterminacy as central to any notion of agency and the future.

It is from within this kind of indeterminacy that I inquire, and in doing so, I am open to a process that is mobile and is crucial for my belief, not only in the potential for different futures, but in the potential for learning as an experience within difference.

Thresholds: Importance of this research

A pedagogical threshold is the site of touching, physical or otherwise, of one with another. This threshold is the moment of difference. It is the site of learning. The importance of this research rests in its process as findings because it is in the dynamic event of writing and making art that understanding about subjectivity can occur, and that pedagogical thresholds can be explored. My personal voice is a learning voice: if the art and words convey my event of learning, the practice may be enlightening for the reader/viewer. This is a significant way to examine tacit values; in aesthetic, personal encounters with the text. Art registers powerfully at the level of being because it is at this deep level that much art is made and it is the level where many of our values are formed. Focusing on awareness of such values can open potential toward social change. I work on these pieces of cloth and acknowledge the significance of existential inquiry with respect to forces of social change that begin with a personal awareness of one's values. This is the ethical connection to ontology that is always addressed within the potential for social change; change that requires us to reflect upon assumptions and values we hold close.

Ontology always has both an ethical and a political dimension. It's not as if we have ontology and ethics, ontology and politics. Ontology is about what there is and what debts we owe to it. It always entails an ethics, a debt, obligation, responsibility. However, ontology does not have a moral dimension, it's not the order of imperative, ought, or law; only an ethical dimension of debt and obligation.

(Elizabeth Grosz interviewed by Ausch, Doane, & Perez. Retrieved: 2005)

The aesthetic and educational intent of my research is to theorize the concept of the threshold as a way to envision pedagogy, subjectivity, and community. As learners, the threshold of the known and the unknown is a place of uncertainty. It is simultaneously a join and division. In this project, thresholds between binaries layer my discussion about the ways that space and place connect to subjectivity and community. I build on the strategy of understanding the world based upon difference within binaries such as self/other and land/viewer. I do not eliminate binary structure but reconfigure it and make it spin and move by focusing on the threshold. I make it run⁴. In art I seek ways that we can conceive of a becoming within difference, not to eliminate it, nor to celebrate it as a binary of cultural difference within a superficial kind of multiculturalism, but to understand the very threshold that defines a difference. This is the place of meaning, of social relationships, and of much art. Educators who find their place in this assemblage and are able to continually adjust within it are often reflective and socially aware of the world.

In reading what jagodinski (2005, p. 30) identifies within the West as a destructive binary of the “neoliberal subject of presence” on the one hand, and the “multiple subject of post-structuralism” on the other, I find a certain refuge because neither polarity seems to suit me as a personal philosophical position. I have felt dissatisfied with the ways that these positions do little to instigate or substantiate social change toward a more hospitable way of living together in the land. Often, the neoliberal subject position is not conducive to living within difference with others, as it is usually focused on personal gain and individualism. Yet, neither is the opposite, relativity of multiple subject positions conducive to valuing difference as a site of learning when, in practice, all positions are intent on working toward political recognition of their particular place. A final, ontological problem with both positions is that they often assume a complete and substantial identity, rather than flexibility and emergence that accompany the shift to the notion of sharing and “being with” (Nancy, 2000). Therefore, both positions seem stagnant to me, and ineffectual as a means by which we can move toward social change that acknowledges difference as an intimate part of collective life. Furthermore, neither position satisfies my personal questions of subjectivity that help me understand my values and my life, as I see my self in constant emergence. Here is where I have been engaged and yet stalled, trying to find a middle between these two very different realities, neither one completing the ways that I am, as I cut tiny holes into the delicate, frayed edges of this decaying, faded cloth, or as I stand in front of thirty students in a classroom and politely orchestrate our time together.

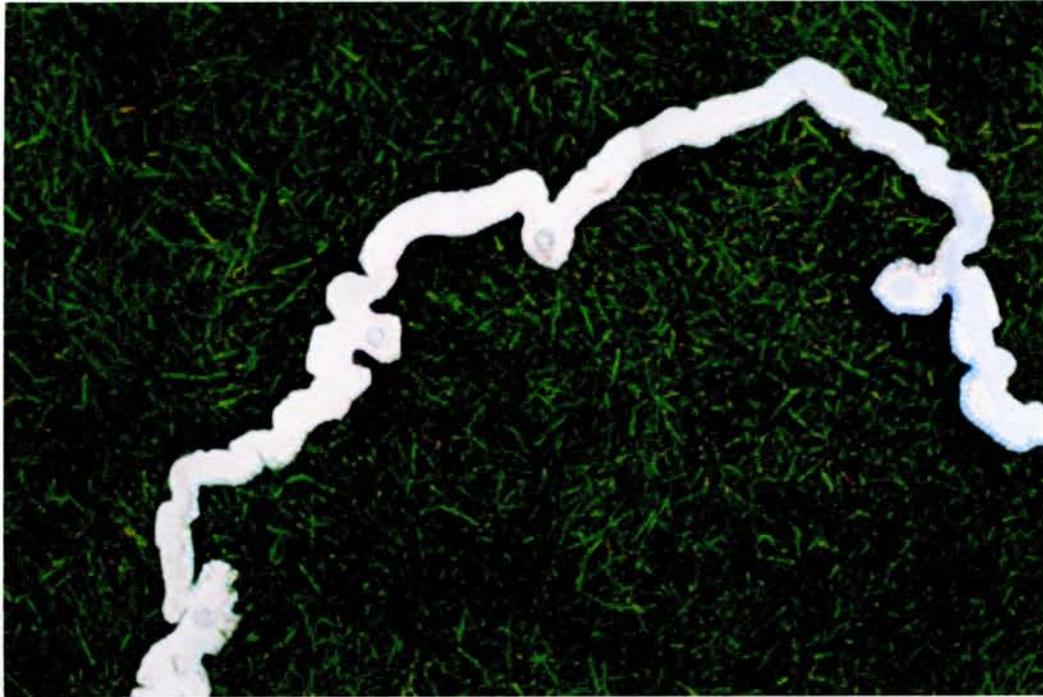
My theoretical engagement requires that I imagine borders as porous and flexible. The threshold is at the edges where two sides touch: where the relationship takes place, in a space and time of creating art. It is in this space that I work on these cloths. I conceive of art as the interruption of established knowledge. Therefore, the places, artists, and art here become educational encounters, for it is the threshold that defines each relationship, where newness within difference is experienced and learning can occur.

In this correlation of art and learning rests a further assumption that art education is both powerfully experienced inside and outside of institutions. This is certainly true of visual culture that is felt just about everywhere. There is a multidisciplinary to visual culture in art education that is appropriate because this reflects the ways our various lives cross, collide, mix, and evolve. The circulation of knowledge is sensual; is random; is unending. While many artists and art educators, such as the participants in this study, have acknowledged the educational value of our visual world and have made successful moves to eliminate the artificially held boundaries between school art and the world of art, my project takes this visual world of art and art

education into the ontological realm in an inquiry as to the ways we exist with each other within our communities; be they local, national, and/or global in scale.

In my arts-based inquiry, I find theoretical affirmation in Jacques Derrida's (1974) strategies within thresholds of written/spoken play; in the serious, poetic non/sense of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) assemblage; in the literary, political musings of Jean-Luc Nancy (1997, 2000). Thus, I begin to metaphorically wander through memories of the land with ideas and images about space, time, and place. The ways that Derrida undoes the privileging of pairs within binaries to jostle our assumptions is worthwhile for me as I trace places on/in these cloths: the ways that Deleuze and Guattari imagine assemblages are particularly comfortable for me because through this idea I can interpret the world as an unstable materiality: the ways that Nancy politicizes the relationship of being in the world with others are all absorbed in various degrees into the cloths that are becoming art. All three philosophers reflect post-Heideggerian, continental ruminations on existential finitude and thus, I consider subjectivity from reading these scholars. All three are post-foundational in that they theorize the subject as de-centered, although they come to this subject position in varying ways and in different terms. Specifically, I use the influence of deconstruction of the text that has become a legacy of Derrida as a method of considering the land and art.

As I move in the threshold between these oppositional worldviews, neoliberalism and post-structuralism, I look to Nancy's (1997) argument regarding the ways that the border between two value positions is so porous that with shifts in power, the one continually moves closer to the other. The lucid explanation for this situation that I cite from his work relates to the world of art. Many artists of the modern world severed their connections with the absolutes of their societies, such as religion and other institutions where grand narratives of truth were maintained. However, over time, this relative position became the new absolute as the certainty of relativity gained hold: *all* was relative. Meanwhile, the absolute, universal truths of institutions came to be understood as relative, in that they were believed to be truths held by some but not all. Back and forth, the two sides continually move toward each other in a curious tension whereby they never touch and yet are always already touching – at the threshold (Ibid). The knack is to remain active and continually interrupt within this dialectic, in this slippery middle.



Cloth from *Fire* manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

Within this idea of shifting thresholds, the *between* space is currently an important metaphor in educational research as a strategy of critical inquiry into social change. The borders demarcating local, national, and global spaces also shift, morph, and emerge as they move toward each other. The characteristics of such movements are contingent on the ways that power is shared, secured, and/or lost. Therefore, art and art education that queries how to ethically live in this world of changing political borders is especially timely.

I base my aesthetic inquiry upon the assumption that making art is an act of rupturing meaning within the circulation and negotiation of context and audience. There is power in art to communicate sensually and politically, even when it states otherwise; a denial of political position is also a political position. In other words, the traditional, mimetic representation of nature in landscape art is always more than a pretty picture. In this project, I rework the landscape genre to question the role of landscape traditions that have enforced and continue to reinforce the power relations of our colonial past and present.



Cloth from *Fungus* manipulated by author

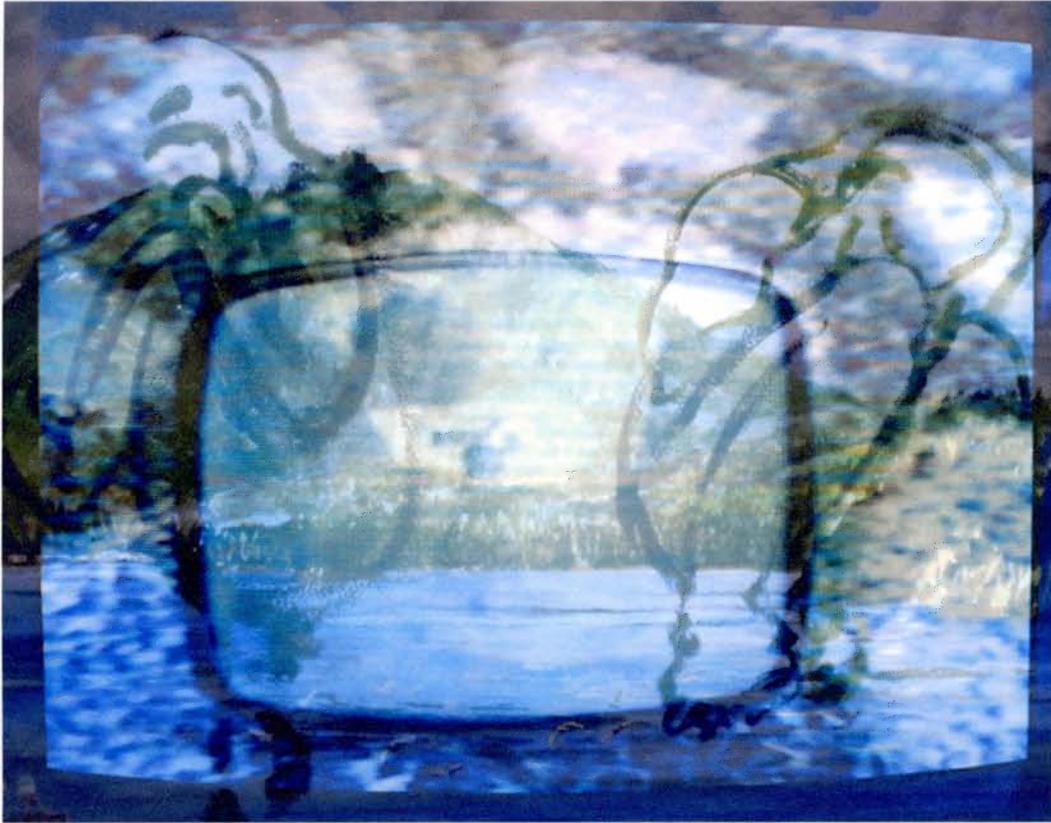
Thus, as I work on the cloths, I move landscape art toward the threshold between an artist's representation of a place as landscape, and a place presenting itself as landscape. To remain both and neither is my goal as I manipulate the fabric. It is important to understand the cloth as material threshold between the tradition of landscape painting and the land because this is an undecided yet fertile place of learning. As I interrupt assumptions, these personal, artistic acts open consideration of my singular place in the shared land, in relation to all others' such singularities.

The ways that these cloths both are, and are not landscape art highlight the political implications of the genre. The land is not only a sensual, physical environment and a fragile living ecosystem, but it is also tied to identity with feelings of inclusion or exclusion. Throughout history, layers of people taking the land from others are in the story of land that is recounted throughout the world. With regard to North American values steeped in colonialism, I have often heard the term "land claims", rather than "land rights", suggesting to me that the history of land taken from First Nations peoples could be further altered, forgotten, or disregarded if sharing this wilderness becomes too fiscally painful for those in dominant positions. By offering views of the land that alter from the normalized vistas in paint, pixel, and celluloid that surround us as much as, or more than the physical landscapes do in our daily lives, I consider values concerning landscape art. I recognize social inequities that are implicated in the sharing of places and spaces. Along with written work, the incongruous notion of these cloths as

landscape art have a potential for surprising the spectator out of assumed notions of traditional landscape art that is connected historically with private land ownership and often represented as sublime wilderness. Also, these cloths, as unusual landscape art, require that we question the authority of the artist to name her art. This opens the discourse toward artistic agency within the context of our communities, whatever their scale.

I attend to the uncertain spaces between creative, embodied practices, and the socio-political functions of artists in popular culture using narrative, fabric, and video. I follow a number of theoretical trajectories that move me through sources from feminist geography, curricular and critical theory, post-structural theory, and visual art and culture. Interpretations of place and landscape as socio-political indicators of power relations, and as ingredients in pedagogy defined as open and embodied, modeled on the uncertain, are in my thoughts as I create art from these pieces of fabric.

I recognize that we continually negotiate the very fragile balance of standards of living with environmental concerns. While it is beyond the scope of my research to investigate all of the moral dimensions of environmental affairs with regard to industry, there is an urgency to understand the liability of the land. To acknowledge that the land is vulnerable is to also understand that each person is vulnerable. This is not a document about environmentalism or environmental aesthetics, although I do not disagree with many aims of this belief system/political movement. My study brushes up against environmental theory as a strong element in the work of two of the artists in this study, and it is considered by all three artist/educators, especially when the art explores stewardship of the land. However, this work goes beyond environmental issues toward the philosophical thresholds of subjectivity and community in the land. I stress a need to move to a deep, existential level of inquiry into values. Only then can we hope to change attitudes and actions with regard to a collective sense of identity, and to our responsibilities as national and world citizens.



Untitled. Mixed media by author

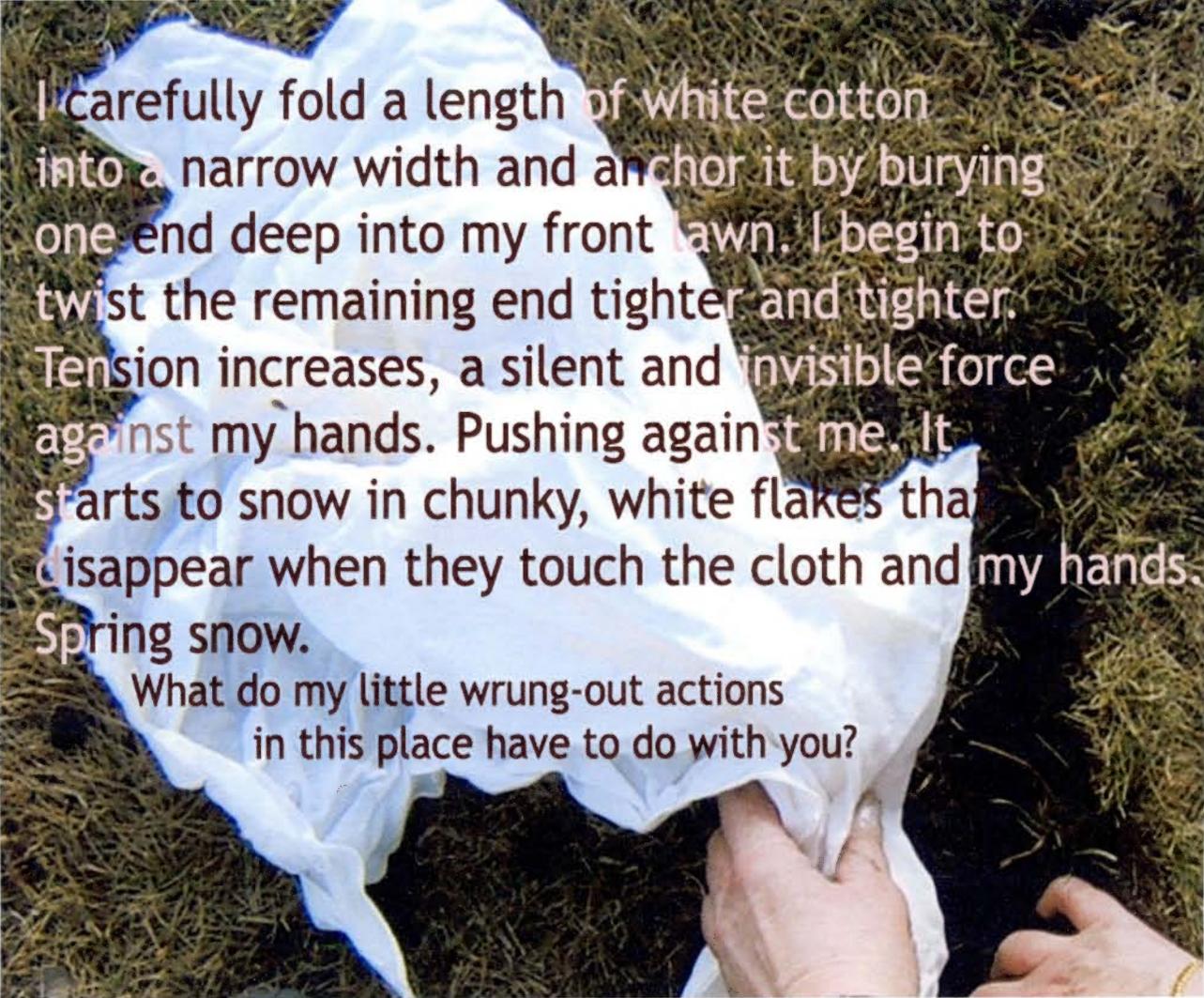
Thinking about the many meanings that are inherent in the terms place, land, and national identity, I look to the apparatus of public sphere theory. I follow the lead of Fraser (2005) who reconsiders the discourse of the public sphere to support emancipatory, democratic change in light of transnational realities. She states that by remaking national institutions, rather than abandoning the nation state entirely, we can respond to disparities among national states and corporate authorities in a transnationalization of the public sphere (Ibid). Thus, I am interested in the continued reconceptualization (Pinar, 1999; Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Pinar et al., 1995) of the institution of public education. Nationalism cannot contain educational curricula. While policy changes to education at local and provincial levels can be limited by nationalistic parameters, I theorize if and how the practices of artists could meet some of the challenges of curricula that in some ways are placed and placeless: bounded by the nation state, but also exceeding all borders.

There is potential for artists' representations of the land to function as a heuristic device in a social imaginary, so that transformations within public spheres occur. The visual artist expresses a very personal voice: it is this personal encounter through materials and images that can move the viewer/reader to consider her own deeply held values. Of interest to me is how one artist's work made in one small part of the world has the possibility of affecting social imaginaries in

unforeseen ways. The circulation of the image within our visual culture is one reality that can be used to open dialogue about social change. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (2002) describes the social imaginary as a way of forming identity on local and global scales. I consider the participation of artists in the construction of social imaginaries in light of contemporary national and global public spheres that are always linked to local places. The creation of, and identification with, a social imaginary is bound in the personal. “They [social imaginaries] are first person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices. They are embedded in the habitus of a population or are carried in modes of address, stories, symbols and the like” (Ibid, p. 2). Such modes of address include the art that is collectively named as national.

The artists presented in this study share their creative processes that I interpret as both singular expressions of place and comprehension that art functions as socio-political commentary with an engaged public. Highlights of each participant’s artistic practice and/or teaching practice are important parts of understanding the ways they locate their work. Images of past and present projects, video and audio text from interviews, and observations of places all contribute to my aesthetic interruptions within the frame of art and education. My artistic form of research values the cross-pollination among creative processes. The rethinking of the neoliberal subject, the influence of place on the formation of the singular and collective being, and the aesthetic process as an entryway into tacit values lead me to and away from the cloth repeatedly. I make decisions from an array of aesthetic choices, and reinterpret the research questions as the cloth continues to change.

The first person narrative frames this inquiry because it is in the personal, singular encounter with another that the event of difference happens. It can be an experience that fosters learning and growth, or one that invokes fear and violence. These many exposures to difference create meaning in community. One role of the *a/r/tographer* is to present the significance of such encounters. I do so in these pieces of cotton.



I carefully fold a length of white cotton into a narrow width and anchor it by burying one end deep into my front lawn. I begin to twist the remaining end tighter and tighter. Tension increases, a silent and invisible force against my hands. Pushing against me. It starts to snow in chunky, white flakes that disappear when they touch the cloth and my hands. Spring snow.

What do my little wrung-out actions
in this place have to do with you?

Elements of the land: Organizing and anchoring narrative



The type of active and emotional vocabulary that shapes my project in the questions that I formulate, in the contradictions that spur me to inquire, and in my desire to better understand an alternative kind of living in community are echoed in Stewart's comment, "The problem of considering 'senses of place,' then, is a problem of tracking the force of cultural [artistic] practices subject to social use and thus filled with moments of tension, digression, excess, deferral, arrest, contradiction, immanence, and desire" (p. 139). When my aesthetic practice comes off of the wall and transforms from wilderness image to dirty, cut cloth, and when I use the cloth as I comment on the singular and collective subject as neither immanent nor transcendent, a pedagogical tension emerges. I describe it as a kind of disturbing, creative space as I work. Within this tension, at various times I digress through spirals of ideas and images, repeating an idea and circling around it from various entryways; in physical manipulations with cloth; in questions from interviews; and in words written and/or altered. Throughout the process, my quest to understand more thoroughly the reasons behind my desire to make landscape art, and to understand values towards wilderness and nature are forces within my process of examining and creating deferrals of power in the binary of artist and land.

I consider many of these concepts within the flick of cloth. Taking my queue from the participating artists, I organize this project around their artistic practices and from the lengths of white cotton that are central to this artistic inquiry. I interrogate the romantic role of landscape art in the social imaginary of wilderness nation that informs contemporary, North American society. I contemplate discourses of power implicit in this pervasive cultural norm, and suggest possible shifts in the relationship of artist, the land, and education. I examine the ways that artistically informed pedagogy doubles as personal expression and opening for social, democratic

change. I map how the project becomes destabilized and re-stabilized, with thick and thin metaphors morphing in and out of place.

The chapters of this dissertation are inspired by each of the eight cloths and/or their places: two pieces of fabric that each of the three artists place and two that I place outdoors reflect elements of the land. I ask for two significant, personal places as a parallel structure to the thresholds between binaries that thread throughout the project. Two pieces of fabric from each artist creates a kind of tension: a separation and a joining. I also acknowledge that the self emerges from a multiple of sources and not solely from one place. This may seem obvious when we discuss the formation of who we are, especially when we discuss identity with children. However, when I consider this fact, that the self is an aggregate assemblage of various contextual experiences and innate characteristics, including places that are physical and/or virtual, then the notion of a national identity that is identified and relatively fixed does not hold much logical strength. If a person is a continual emergence of influences and experiences, then to locate national identity centrally around a concept such as “wilderness nation” suggests one single focus and this seems incongruent with the actual formation of the self in the land – in various places.

Questions about my significant places formulate as I measure, cut, and fold the cloths. Each chapter is framed by studio moments that trace my movements from one cloth to the next, and is built from my manipulations on the pieces of fabric as I make them into another form, as art. I include cultural and educational theory within the folds of each chapter. Each successive section is a move from one element of the land into another. However, like elements in the land, there is simultaneity in that they are all entwined. This is similar to my artistic practice, where studio projects evolve in chorus. This concurrent engagement with art pieces is the way I approach this project. I work on one piece for a time and then turn my attention to another, only to return to the first in a creative, reflective experience. Thus, while some chapters are loosely organized into an introduction, methodology, and conclusion, others are suggested by the elements of the land and do not necessarily progress in a set, linear order. This is reflective of the important way I create art. While a level of structural linearity as a function of communication, education, and learning is necessary, such linear models also reflect the modernist, neoliberal subject (Popkewitz, 1999), a position that I eschew throughout the project. Instead, I base my dis/organization on my inspiration from the data: on the elements that are highlighted within each selected place.

As I enter a chapter I reflect on the threshold between the land as element and the artists’ places as socially and educationally significant. After the *Entrance* and *Methodology* chapters

that frame the others, comes the chapter entitled *Wind*. It is a reference to Robert Dmytruk's cloth that he lay out in his garden. Inspired by observations of the wind moving across borders between rural and urban spaces, I investigate the potential power in crossing borders on local, national, and global scales, and intimate the potential for social transformation through cultural networks that do the same. Specifically, I trace the development of landscape art as an indicator of social hierarchy, and with the Group of Seven painters, I point toward one way that a social imaginary of nationalism tied to colonialism is subtly perpetuated in Canada through images and institutions.

This inquiry into the need to re-evaluate the ways we think of nationalism with regard to the land and myth, leads me to a discussion about the ways that art education is complicit in perpetuating narrow views of landscape art and nationalism. In the chapter, *Soil*, inspired by the burial of my first cloth, I consider the difficulties within art education based upon the neoliberal model, and look for the emergent subject through a consideration of space from the illusion of distance in landscape painting to the proximity of buried cloth. I use the metaphor of gesture drawing to connect embodied learning to the hierarchy within the teacher/student relationship, suggesting strategies that could open curriculum toward a increasingly shared endeavour.

This reconsideration of the teacher/student relationship presupposes the necessity of changes at the deep level of values, and so, in the chapter entitled, *Fungus*, where Pat Beaton's first cloth is highlighted, I interrogate the nature of subjectivity. Inspired by notions of decay, throughout the chapter I consider Nancy's (2000) theory of finitude, being, and community. The potential toward meaning and agency that he suggests occurs within the limits of shared life could move schooling toward a more empathetic emphasis but this requires underscoring the emergent relationship between two individuals as integral to existential being, to learning, and to the nature of community.

The chapter, *Water*, is instigated by Peter von Tiesenhausen's cloth that he wedged into the bank of a stream. With reference to comments by Derrida (see Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000) and Nancy (2000) about hospitality, I note the importance of acknowledging and understanding difference within a multicultural classroom and world. Social transformation rests within our singular abilities to learn within diversity. It reinforces the nature of learning: it is always at the threshold of this differential: between the known and the new: between comprehension and fear.

The next chapter, called *Wood*, refers to my second cloth and one of Robert Dmytruk's pieces, both of which were connected to trees. This leads me to the element of space that is always present in art and subjectivity. I investigate the subject with regard to the ways that power

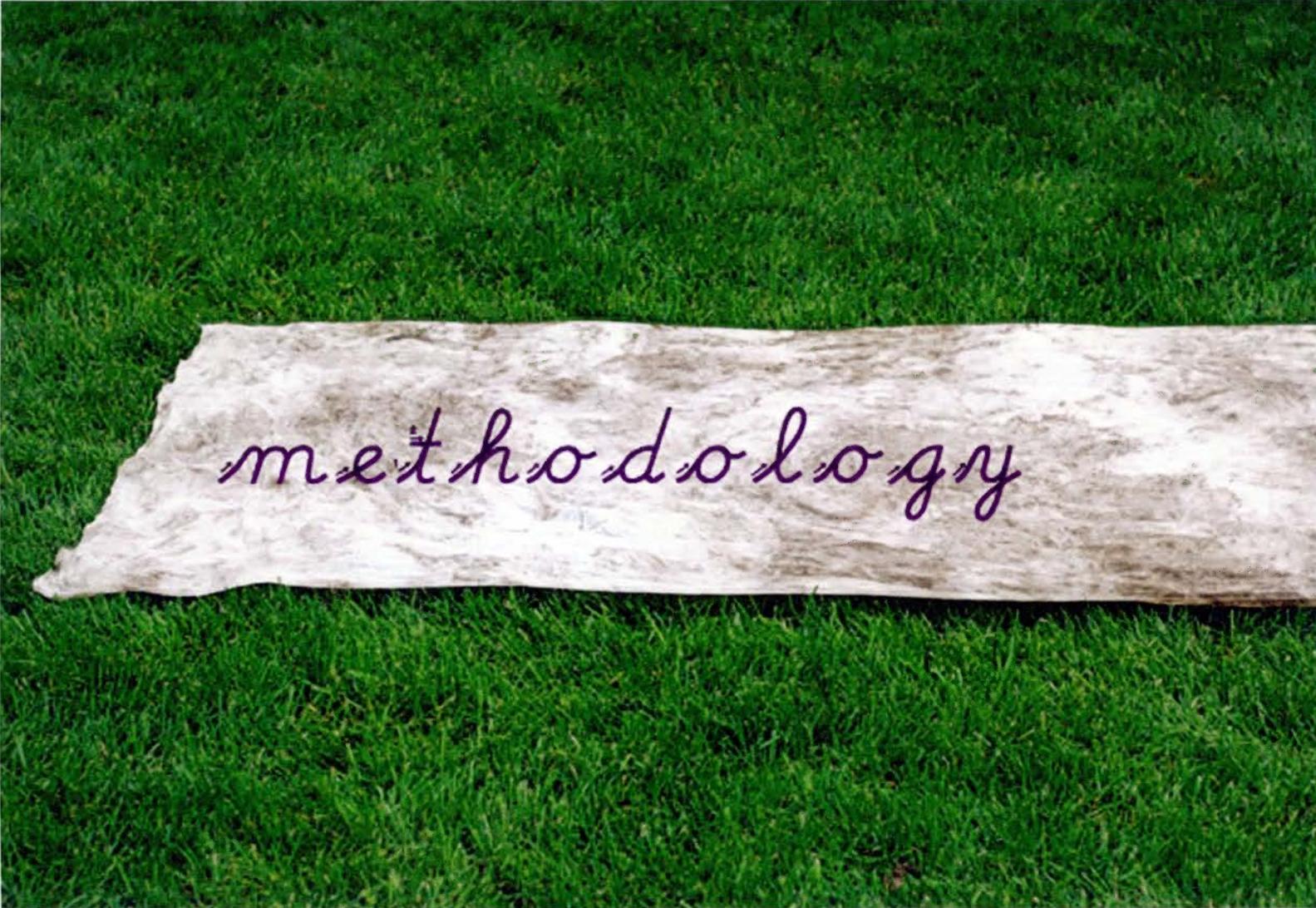
relations are negotiated according to different interpretations of space and place. I link these considerations to public schools, noting the unknowability of all students' attitudes toward shared spaces in schools. I also suggest the theoretical strategies of the stranger and the threshold as means by which artist/educators and students can begin to question the political realities of their lived spaces.

The chapter named *Fire* is a reference to Pat Beaton's second cloth that she burned as performance art. It reminds me of Pat's method of challenging herself with work that is unwieldy and excessively large as an entrance into a creative situation that is slightly beyond control. I am interested in her desire to reach such uncertain places in her work and how this becomes a learning environment. The remnants of that fire inspire me to contemplate Derrida's supplement and the learner as emergent subject. From these thoughts I emphasize the power of the imagination in creating social change, and the necessity for free time to honour the work of the imagination. Transformative, social change needs this public space and time.

Snow is the title of the subsequent chapter that is created from Peter von Tiesenhausen's second cloth. Here I reflect on the role of the artist as social critic. I refer to the participants' art as pedagogical moments of social intervention toward a greater understanding of negotiated community. Also, as an example of a pedagogical moment within the classroom, I use a critique of the artists' public persona to discuss the stereotypical typecasting of artists that is aligned to the profit margin within the art world. Finally, I contemplate the reasons behind the success of some art to shift established norms and the ramifications of this potential within the art curriculum.

The concluding chapter is called *Stone*, the element considered by all three participating artist/educators in their stories and/or gestures. I end with a series of openings so that the emergent theme traced throughout the project continues; that social transformation can begin with aesthetic learning processes, including reflection on tacitly held values, and that art communicates on a singular, personal level to aid this reflection. Also, I highlight the importance of understanding that learning is situated at the threshold that defines difference. Learning to ethically live in the shared land is one challenge within this point of difference. To facilitate such learning, art educators need to open spaces for ontological reflection of the subject. The creative methods that I employ throughout the project are aimed at such openings.

Through each encounter with the white cotton fabric, I contemplate the research questions and raise further questions. The project evolves through burials, knots, fires, and folds of fabric in urban gardens, suburban lawns, isolated rivers, and empty roads.



methodology

Peter: I am shredding my old drawings and stuffing them into the cracks - back into pulp. It is that idea of just taking things - it is about a process. It is not about producing a product.

Interview #1

Robert: I don't know. I don't find these [paintings] challenging to me. They resolve themselves so quickly that I don't really get a chance to become part of them. At least that is how I feel.

Interview #2

Assembling threads and shredding drawings: Thoughts wrapped in cloth

I take my arts-based inquiry into creative, theoretical realms by considering the functions of the artist/researcher/teacher in the multiple public spheres that flow through and around ideas about art and curriculum. I continually reconfigure these three roles because of my overlapping interests in the fields of teaching and art. My analytical considerations and my intuitive acts of emplacement and manipulation of materials mark my interpretation of the role of the artist with regard to learning. My art-making is research into the ways that I shape, and am shaped by places.

In attempting to structure this research from processes of art, I am confronted with meanings that overwhelm in their abundance. I endeavour to locate place as an anchor for inquiry through the physical manipulation of white cotton. But like white cotton, place continually refers its signification, and meanings slide away within the excess. I attempt to fasten white cotton in theoretical “place” with physical processes of digging and tying, twisting and burying. Thus, I manoeuvre through, under, in, and out of theoretical and artistic bits of gravel and shake the cloth free of dirt. Meanings cling. I return to conversations and place myself in the company of other artists.

Peter: Either you are on the same trail and you're seeing things you haven't seen before, or you are on a new trail...”

Interview #2

There are traces of places on the cloth in the smudges of random, natural occurrences. I rework the fabric, creating manifestations of relationships with the participants and with art. The art that these artists make in and of the land inspires me in my work, and I base the research on the places that they deem special. I relax into the doing of art, noticing a mark, smelling a surface, unfolding a corner, refolding a layer, and mimicking a gesture of the video recording.

My research methodology is arts-based, whereby my creativity fuels and frames the process of inquiry (Barone, 2001, 2006; Dunlop, 2001; Finley, 2005; Irwin & Springgay, 2007; Sullivan, 2005; Sumara, 2003; Swanson, 2004). I embrace art as knowledge in the form of an interruption: an aesthetic shift into thinking about pedagogy and curriculum, not as fixed entities within various institutions, but as assemblages. In the organization of this project I look to the ways that it resembles the rhizomatic assemblage suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Any part of the project, including the fabric, the interview, the video recording, the silent work in my garage, the artists' places, their art, the words of narrative and poetry, the political ramifications of the

entangled with other components of the research. Within the inevitable run of significations, it is the action of the chain of meaning that becomes the force creating understanding. This continual emergence becomes more important than any individual coding (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In the cotton, for example, the sheer number of references leaves a surfeit of generality where none stands more important than any other. I am left with considering the motion of each meaning sliding to the next. This is one important aspect of the assemblage, that there are “no points, only lines, trajectories” (Ibid, p. 8). Thus, I neither seek hybridization of methods, nor do I seek cause and outcome within the data, but instead, open spaces for thought within associations of various aspects (Swift, 2005). I touch the data, moving from one carefully chosen method or another, landing with a thought and taking off again.

Because the field of qualitative, educational research is continually evolving and adjusting to various influences, such as arts-based research, it has expanded to include a number of theoretical trajectories and methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). My work as a form of narrative and visual art is a move within this flexible genre of qualitative research. This project grows from the roots of case study methodology but twists within this paradigm to disrupt it. The educational research framework of the case study becomes the point of departure from which I position unexpected forays of creative play with language and image through a series of landscape spaces. I disrupt the case study methodology because while I have interviewed, reported, and theorized the findings from the participants in a relatively traditional manner, there is a large part of the project that is based upon non-linear creative processes, and personal narrative and exploration that is outside the traditional case study approach.

When art is filtered through the academy, aesthetic process moves as research into the rubric of scholarly knowledge. As an artist working in this context, I need to be aware of every ripple as I appropriate, trying on various methods within my creative endeavours. I am careful not to shape my artistic work into the existing established structures unquestioningly. To do so is merely the molding of creative artistic practice into a reproduction of educational research practices: this is to cut out the heart of why I make art – to disrupt, explore and create meaning in response to political, ethical, and sensual worlds. Thus, as Sullivan (2005) warns, I am cognizant not to thoughtlessly style an existing, non-aesthetic methodology onto my work. I use existing fragments of various established methodologies with a certain irony – I use them with a critical awareness of their limitations and of their contexts within educational and artistic paradigms. In this way, the work becomes a multiple of theoretical, artistic glances.



Cloth from *Water* manipulated by author

I am aware of the lines redrawn in educational research to accommodate and at times to welcome arts-based methodologies. There is a rich base of arts-based research currently evolving within the educational field. The positioning of arts-based research within the qualitative research model was originally a space opened for me largely through the work of Elliot Eisner. He summarizes the strength of arts-based research in artists' abilities to translate the complexity of living through their personal expression and meaning making. The arts jolt us back into doubt from habitual daily activities that, in education, are tacitly understood from the traditions of scientific knowledge (Eisner, 2006).

However, Eisner (1995) places the power to judge arts-based research within more customary qualitative research practices. As some art educators point out, to leave arts-based research in the form of traditional qualitative social sciences research is to limit the ways that new knowledge through art inquiry is possible (Sanders, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). I am aware as I manipulate my way through these cloths that they are the focus - degraded, torn, and anonymous, of a philosophical and material pursuit into reconfigured research territory.

A/r/tography: Qualitatively unfolded and cut

Arts-based research has evolved in many forms that include all areas of the arts, such as music, dance, film, etc. For visual art educators whose practice includes teaching about art and making art, the methodology of a/r/tography is especially suitable. The three letters with slashes in between, a/r/t, and the second part of the word, graphy implies the fluid nature of simultaneously being an artist, researcher, and teacher who makes art. The slashes emphasize the threshold spaces among the three roles. These are pedagogical spaces. The juxtaposition of art and graphy signifies that the written word and the image are assembled in ways that can create a threshold of the known and unknown. The play of the visual and the verbal has been the focus of my and the participants' interactions. I borrow the practice from a/r/tography that entails creative combinations of autoethnography and narrative inquiry in written and visual investigation (de Cosson, 2003; Irwin, 2004, 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2007; Kind, 2003; Leggo, 2007; Pente, 2005; Sinner et al. 2006; Springgay, 2004).

An important and unique aspect of a/r/tography is not only the visual aspect of the research but also its non-linear nature. While working linearly has never been my way, when process bumps into the organized structure of academic tradition, a potential disconnect is inherent. As a visual artist, I initially found the context of educational scholarship a unique trial. While the qualitative umbrella continues to expand and diversify, it is still traditionally situated within discourses of writing, so that the process of dissertation research for a visual artist presents particular challenges. However, when creating images, objects, and text, there is a potential of a more holistic view of the data than if it is represented only in text (Raggl & Schratz, 2004). The more I try to analyze what I make, the visual languages I often use begin to change, and I find that I am becoming a different scholar and a different artist.

Additionally, the situational, emergent tone found in a/r/tographical work highlights the relational, contextual aspects of working aesthetically. Imbalances and shifts within power structures that are exposed in the contexts of a/r/tographical work open opportunities for critical reflexive inquiry (Irwin et. al., 2006).

If we conceive of art as a place “where things can happen” rather than a thing “that is in the world” we will see how an engagement between art production and critical theory becomes necessary and the education itself is a multi-faceted interdisciplinary field that moves in many spaces as opposed to staying within one mode of production, or form. (Sheikh, retrieved 2006)

While Sheikh highlights the important connection between critical theory and the creation of art, he also emphasizes education's capacity for diverse forms. Following this, by naming *a/r/tography* as my methodology I cannot generalize what this entails. The interesting quality of this form of research is that there exists a very individual artistic stamp over this way of inquiring. Like art, *a/r/tography* resists set definition, continually outgrowing its identity. My work becomes slightly deviant from other forms of *a/r/tographical* research. Firstly, the grammar associated with some aspects of *a/r/tography* offered by Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005) developed into a specific register with terms such as "reverberations" and "renderings". This language holds a poetic charm and valence that speaks to a personal voice that is not my own, and so I seek other terms. Words become personal, iconographic emblems. *A/r/tography* must reach the very limits of my and others' discoveries. Thus, I find my own signs for this singular activity that melds art and education. While I select various aspects of *a/r/tography*, such as the inspirational ways that images and words can be configured, I leave others, such as specific vocabulary of method, in keeping with my own artistic investigation.

Secondly, a more serious, tacit assumption within *a/r/tography* and other arts-based inquiries in various forms is the artist is assumed to be an unquestioned, cultural authority, with potential to influence public attitude through unique acts and objects of art. This kind of frame for the artist has modernist overtones that are supported by the neoliberal subject represented in the artistic genius of the romantic period. The idea of the "art star" has been inherited from the nineteenth century notion of the isolated, misunderstood artist. This has morphed into a political hierarchy that fuels much of the contemporary art market. Part of the spin within this market rests in a melding of the public intellectual with the art star. While it is the case that many artists supported within the gallery system do work at a level that is enlightening about issues that are public, a generalization of difficult or incomprehensible art with assumed intellectualism is not helpful for artists or their viewers. This is sometimes used as an advertising ploy and is an unfortunate circumstance that can create distrust within the public towards art and artists. Once again, the residue of the nineteenth century, the modernist model of misunderstood artist leaves her outside of her community, instead of active participant within society.

Care must be taken by *a/r/tographers* that this modernist model of artist in society, distanced from the public, is not transported into the artist/researcher/teacher position, where the work that we do is both artistic and educational. By making art as research in the field of education, we sometimes accept the position of artist without much scrutiny. Differentiation between the art star as a function of the market, and the artist as an active participant in community is not always

acknowledged. While I understand that these two positions are often blurred, it is necessary to make the distinction because the social significance of the art can become lost if it is veneered with a marketing gloss that merely reflects the spectator's own image back to her. Art as acquisition must not take precedent over the educational value of the artist's voice.

As an artist and educator, I assume that my unique contribution to the field of education will come from my abilities to create art and reflect upon it. While there is a level of truth to this, I am wary of accepting this strategy of reflection unconditionally. I am wary of a potential thinning of methodological power is implicit in reflection. This aesthetic work of reflection must also be called into question so that the embedded assumptions within it are named and considered. As Foster (1996, p. 179) warns, "Be careful in reflection that it does not become an 'othering of the self' in narcissistic self-absorption." In education, reflective practice has a long, rich history⁵. Carson (1997) has warned, within this discourse, that reflection as a new absolute, positioned against the established traditions of education as transmission of knowledge and skills, is equally ineffectual for the emergent subject. He comments, "Reflective practice, implemented as an authoritative discourse of teaching, has failed to problematize the modernist notion of the individuated, self-transparent consciousness, fully in control of itself" (Ibid, p. 86). There exist a number of different forms of reflective practice, and care must be taken so that the term, reflection, does not lose its pedagogical power that exists because of such diversity of scholarly practice. My a/r/tographical reflection is combined with the creation of knowledge in the forms of image and text so that it remains a specific, personal kind of reflection within educational and artistic circles.

In my narrative and autobiographical research I look for faint notes at some level of narcissistic undertone and I wonder about my public exposure. Ultimately, however, I understand this kind of reflective research as particularly worthy of our attention when the personal touches another: when I hear a story that I relate to my life stories, it is this connection of the personal that makes a powerful relationship and can be potent research and learning. Therefore, in eschewing the modernist artistic and educational subject position, I share with other artists and educators in a process: a thought and a moment of artistic consideration where the context, intent, and reception are all aspects of the negotiated, reflective relationship between artist/educator and spectator/student.

This is relevant for the state of a/r/tography because the connection of the creative, artistic process to the formation and circulation of knowledge is characteristic of the methodology. It stands to reason that a/r/tographers need to carefully examine their assumptions regarding the

role of art in knowledge production. Specifically, I inquire using a/r/tography because I want to better understand the ways I can rupture rather than reproduce knowledge when my place is physical and imagined within local, national, and/or global perceptions.

I note points of discord between what I perceive to be my ethical framework and my actions within my artistic practice. I am compelled to paint landscape pictures in very representational detail but as an artist who is interested in reflecting the conditions of our times, these paintings characterize the opposite standpoint: painting as decoration. I work against my self. There seems to be a crack in my oeuvre. To grapple with the reasons behind contrariness is generative for creative activity and for learning. An awareness of the ambiguity in life remains throughout my art, research, and teaching practices. According to Irwin (2004, p. 33),

To live the life of an artist who is also a researcher and teacher is to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently.

Like the a/r/tographical methodology itself, I dwell in between these two conflicting positions: my watercolour paintings do not align with my convictions about art but I continue to devote valuable time on them, to display, and own them. I carry the weight of both perspectives as I direct my energy into understanding my personal paradox. I use written forms to interrogate the visual forms and then reverse the process.

A/r/tography is a methodology that commits to this messy process. As a way of expressing and creating life experiences, I stir memory, narrative, paradox, and poeticism into a mix that is very personal. It has many similarities with fine arts research as practice-based and creative where the actual methodology becomes defined by the process (Macleod & Holdridge, 2002). Through the manipulation of materials, I shape theories with my hands and the intuitive and sometimes illogical processes of word-smithing. Over many years, this is a tactic that I have internalized as an artist, but I am deeply aware of different nuances within the process as I move among the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher. The way that words and images create connections to a reader unknown to me is a curious teaching opportunity. But my confidence as a writer pales as I move into creating with the fabric. I am much bolder here, sure of each mark. In the frenzy of creative energy, I do not think. Here I am physical, self-absorbed, and insensitive to the reflective lesson in whatever form it takes. An artist's practice, like that of the teacher, is very personal and very public. A/r/tography is marked by processes of gaining and losing transparency. "This is the nature of understanding through the multiplicity of arts-based research,

a temporary understanding, that cannot necessarily be retained but is staging ground for further reflection” (de Cosson, Irwin, Grauer, & Wilson, 2003, p. 10).

My aesthetic inquiry is intimate and I choose to reveal this in the research. Therefore, the methodology I use is laced with the confessional. It is an exposure. I deliberately choose to make personal work. One might assume that all artists’ work is personal but there are levels of distancing that occur within the artist’s realm, just as there are within the educational field. To conclude that all art-making is personal expression is like saying that all research is personal expression: yes and no. This degree of intimacy rests in the form, in the method, and in the presentation. The important question to ask and consider throughout my work is why my very private arts-based inquiry would be of any importance to educational publicity. How does my intimacy become instruction for the institution?

By way of instigating some kind of response to this question I turn to Maxine Greene as a source. Years ago she saw the need for teachers to tell their personal stories within the institution of education. She sums up the importance for researchers to find the power that rests within their own style and voice, by way of anecdotes from her life. She writes:

It is important to me...to summon up the ways in which I was demeaned in my early days of college teaching by being told I was too ‘literary’ to do philosophy. That seemed to mean that I was thought ill equipped to do the sort of detached and rigorous analysis of language games and arguments that for a long time dominated the academic world. I could not objectify nor separate my subjectivity from what I was perceiving. I could not separate my feeling, imagining, wondering consciousness from the cognitive work assigned to me to do. Nor could I bracket out my biography and my experiences of embeddedness in an untidy, intersubjective world. (Greene in Slattery & Dees, 1998, p. 48)

As I read many of Greene’s comments at various points along this research journey, I have an uncanny sense of complete familiarity. It is as if she has verbalized many of my thoughts, and her work continues to be an inspiration for me. Following Greene, I value the experiential, personal autobiographical quality of a/r/tography as a cyclical practice of reflection and creative knowledge production. Within the thresholds among various contexts associated with artist, researcher, and teacher, such as the gallery system, academia, and the classroom, I examine carefully my physical and theoretical movements among these multiple places. As Whitelaw notes, “The place from which one speaks, whether sexed, raced, classed, and/or geographical, has crucial effects for *what* one says, and also *how* one says it...[thus] highlight[ing] the provisional and critical relations to power...” (2007, p. 206, italics in original). Like Whitelaw, I

recognize in my familiarity with the land of central and northern Ontario that I use personal experiences in the form of narratives to lend authority to my claims about Canadian identity and wilderness. Similarly, anecdotes from my teaching strengthen my criticisms regarding art education. Autobiographical experiences are recounted throughout my aesthetic inquiry.



Cloth from *Water* manipulated by author

I look to artistic practices informed by performance, video, and installation art coupled with the activities popularly denoted as craft, such as sewing, needlework, and quilting. At one point I reassign the cloths as domestic activities rather than art objects. I experiment and I fragment. This rearranging of materials contributes to my reflection about my place in art education. By taking apart the cloths and ideas, and putting them together differently, I assimilate moments of philosophy into my personal encounters, in my journal and in my garage/studio as I touch these cloths. I slowly acknowledge the transformations in the cloths through my body. I allow my self to play, as a scholar, in the same ways that I always play as an artist. As I work, I consider Maxine Greene and a legacy of personal, thoughtful deliberations that are powerful reminders that transformation on a personal level can lead to changes in an institution. This thread pulls my research into theories of community and subjectivity. I do not roll out these topics in orderly fashion, but rather there exists in my thinking a simultaneity that words alone cannot properly express in any kind of syntactical order. There exists in the work a creative embodiment of various ideas and actions that disrupts the syntax of academic language.

Art and graphy

“Language is a skin; I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words.”

Roland Barthes, 1978, p. 73

The relationship of the visual to the written in *a/r/tography* is a complex and intriguing one. Through the interactions of art and word, musing in the reflexive role of critic helps me delve deeper into the art. But it is complex deciphering and serious play that must occur to gain understanding in this methodology. Words haunt me in ways that the cloth does not. I do not attempt to force connections between the words and images. I only record in words my silent making of the work. Slowly I bend the sharp corners of academic writing and allow the words to play, as I instinctively do with the cloths in my hands. I learn to write from the way that I know how to make art. The words in turn, feed the next stitch in a way that can only be explained with the passage of more time in the opening of more space: only explained by reading and viewing in the first person - for it is in the exposure to work in a sensual/sensed making sense⁶ that is significant. Springgay (2004) poeticizes certain nuances in the relationship between the two activities: “Art is meant to slip alongside words, catching slightly, only to break apart and completely miss one another at times” (p. 26). As the word implies, *a/r/tography* is a methodology that honours both art and graphy (writing): it is a methodology that needs both and remains with potential, in the threshold of both. There is a challenge in the process of writing and making images so that neither the images nor the text take a dominant position in the work. This is one way that marks *a/r/tography* from other methodologies such as visual sociology.

In sociology, images are used to support the text, and do not usually develop the research as an intricate part of a creative inquiry. Visual additions to research often accompany and enhance the information rather than generate new knowledge. For example, images elicit memories in interview devices, explain an unfamiliar concept, or make presentations memorable (Martin & Martin, 2004). These are all welcome additions to the further shaping and expansion of research methodologies, but my purpose in *a/r/tography* is to move the image, object, and activity into a creative relationship with the word, and in doing so, interrupt assumptions. This is a difficult challenge – I flutter an image into a word - not as a description but as a flow (Irwin, 2006) as I work materials with my hands.

Sumara (1998) also notes an important difference between simply researching about practice and researching to include “the fullness of experiences in which these practices are situated”(p. 43). In his discussion of action research, he calls for researchers to, “refuse the familiar, the predictable, and the safe”, and to allow the experience of re/searching to shape who they are and who they will become (Ibid, p. 42). In other words, the intent of the inquiry is not only to record and present findings, but also to create opportunities to consider the ontological ramifications involved in doing the research. Thus, I look to include a quality of the here and now in the research: in the present tense. In the manipulation of materials, I concretize an aspect of existence through the re/presentation of conversations and past creations.

I take information in one form, that of the spoken word, object, or moving image, and I saturate it into other forms. The form and content of the data become so familiar to me that they inspire alternative, at times incongruent art. While Irwin (2006) speaks of her painting as a methodology of transformation, from her aesthetic experience in nature to the process of recording that experience on canvas, it is the creative act of transforming from one form to another that is key. It signals my learning as artist, researcher, and educator. Kind (2003) describes the way that a/r/tography is grounded in a particular perspective of knowledge. “[A/r/tography] emphasizes experience rather than particular practices, and becoming rather than doing” (p. 3). Artistic inquiry in any form suggests a kind of reflection that occurs through the study of individual, meaningful experiences, objects, and relationships. This can be facilitated using a continual process of recording and decoding everyday encounters in both written and visual forms (Barone, 2001; de Cosson, 2003; Dunlop, 2001; Eisner, 1995; Irwin, 2003, 2004; Rose, 2001; Springgay, 2004).

By reframing from one medium to another, this mobility of narrative into these different registers opens spaces in the process that affords me a kind of hermeneutic feedback (Foster, 2002). The information that I convey in the artwork is not always clear to me, and this unique character of artistic process is where I can learn, and where others can learn from my uncertainty. The incongruence among these different forms: oral, aural, written, and visual is the creative relation that in/forms, trans/forms, and per/forms the work.

My art processes are bodily methods of deterritorializing and reterritorializing layers of the subject. With each studio encounter, I approach the materials differently, and I think of my artistic practice that is so tied to my acknowledgement of being in this world, of self. Each act on these pieces of cloth indicates a time and space of my existence: a marker. In other words, with each artistic action, meaning is made in the ways that I, as subject, sees her self in place.

Aesthetic inquiry thickens my world into more complex relations of shared places and interior spaces in the contexts of others. In this case, the others are the three participating artists, and my inquiry includes my memories of our conversations, their gestures caught on video, and their art that I have studied. My awareness is filtered through a sensual materiality, and it is always through this sense that I understand my body in place: touching and being touched. If the a/r/tography that evolves from these conversations and cloth moves others to consider their relational existence, my project is pedagogically successful.

So what is my relationship with this activity on the cloths? How does it differ from my calling it art? I am unable to name them art at this point. I can name them education much more easily. This is because every time I unroll the cloths I think about all this and it feels like I have learned something. What exactly? Well, I begin from the assumption that they are political in the ways that all education and all art is political: personal in the dispersion of my values in each semantic, acrobatic move, and every motion and touch of my fingers on the cloths. This is unavoidable and acceptable. I continue to work on the molding of them into something that I can identify as art that becomes a statement of the seepage of values into all relationships. While I agree with the feminist adage that the personal is political, my peculiar twist on the familiar phrase suggests a thinning of confidence. When I move my intimate work to the realm of educational and art institutions - the places where the political could shift society toward change in a public way, I hesitate. I believe deeply in the necessity of becoming public, but I also recognize how artists can hide behind their public work yet at the same time, be curiously exposed by it. I feel this ambivalence and seek the artistic and academic kinds of courage that are required to become public. To become vulnerable. Meanwhile, I think of these cloths as strange, domestic actions.

Personal Journal

Narrating within the threshold of theory and practice

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark on the tensions that exist among scholars concerning the value placed on theory and experience within research. When research is done through narrative, certainty of meaning is not a goal nor is it relevant. This is contrary to formalist research methodologies that construct an argument based on scientific hypotheses and proofs. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) identify a divide between the personal, active involvement of the researcher and the distant writing style of traditional models of qualitative, social science based models. They value the personal literary style of the narrative voice. Arts-based research, which often includes forms of narrative research, focuses on creative expressions of experience. It is through these expressions that theory is interpreted. Neither experience nor theory is primary, but rather the one informs the other at various times during the research process. From my position as artist/educator this is the impetus for my project. I seek to identify the points of tension between scholarly critique and concrete action with materials. I remain in the middle of these two poles of theory and practice so that an alternative kind of space is advantaged. This kind of space is created through object, action, and word.

I present my life differently in this threshold between theory and practice. This is aesthetic inquiry that creates a deeper reflection and cross section of diverse concepts than does the silent practice of art-making, or the analytical practice of applying theory to teaching. Autoethnography functions as a way to connect personal experiences to more public, cultural experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). If I follow my reflective vignettes of the past and present, as memory fuels my imaginative conceptions about the future, I understand research as a process that is both creative and analytic, where the form and content are inseparable (Richardson, 2003).

Theory made of art. Theory in the making. Art educators, Atkinson and Dash (2005, p. xii), describe the importance of understanding that practice and theory are parts of one complex relationship.

[There is] fusion of the practical with the critical, whereby art practice is critical practice. So we do not prioritize the practical over the critical or vice versa. Rather we wish to posit a dialectical relationship in which practical and critical mutually inform- the other, where critical ideas are given visual form and where visual form provides impetus for more refined critical practice, and so on. The old myth of art being concerned with the practical and not the theoretical is banished because the practical and the critical are inseparable in this relationship.

What I hope to identify with this research is my learning process and in the combinations of my art with those of other participants, Gitlin's (2005, p. 20) remarks emboss my methodology.

In one way, therefore, looking at and with data is a metaphor for an abandonment and a leading out from certainty. This search can alter the authors' orientation, from one of trying to show superior knowledge to one that is more common among poets – who use their imaginations and creative powers to name the bounds of their identity and, at the same time, search for new possibilities that exceed the current limits of identity and everyday politics.

My *a/r/tography* is a creative means by which I open possibilities for others to share in my creative process. As I move along, the blind alleys, wrong turns, and hidden curves are shared with the reader/viewer. As Irwin & Springgay (2007, pp. 3-4) describe, "Process becomes intertextually and multiply located in the context of discursive operations. It is a process of invention rather than interpretation, where concepts are marked by social engagements and encounters." I share my practices as educator and artist with others, and thereby become reflected through their interpretations of my work. Sharing theories, thoughts, words, and images is vital to the process, and the participants, as artists, were involved in this way. The methodology borrows from action and participatory research practices (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). As Carson and Sumara (1997, p. xvi) note about the sense of emergence within action research, "like the writer of fiction, the educational researcher must not only learn to live a life that allows one to perceive differently, the educational researcher must, in some way, find ways in which to represent not only the conclusions of inquiry, but, as well, the path of thinking and inquiry that has led to these conclusions". The parallels are evident in their description of the inquiry process and my process of *a/r/tography*. The description of action research as autobiographical; grounded in the practitioner's own experiences (Hobson, 1996) is yet another way to describe the intimate quality of *a/r/tography*. Also, a similarity between action research and arts-based research lies in the value placed on democratic participation, where participants cooperate to reflect on tacitly held knowledge (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993). Finally, the focus within action research on the reflective aspect of the inquiry process as, "virtually unlimited is scope in relation to the development of personal and professional self-awareness" (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996) could also be used to outline an important aspect of my work.

As part of my creative analytic practice (Richardson, 2003) with words and images, the art of the participants, and the footage of gestures caught on video, I cite my task as one of remaining within the doubleness and contradiction of paradox wherever I encounter it. Throughout the

work, each potential path challenges me. In the end, the more intimate I became with my memories of encounters with the participants, spurred by repeated reviews of the data, the more openings for relevant play in theory, conversation, and art began to appear for me.

As I work, I wonder how to include enough of a philosophy to satisfy these dirty cloths: these places that have marked them: these landscapes. Too meager an explanation leaves this art a self-indulgence incomprehensible to almost everyone but those who sit in the acropolis of the Western European art world. This is the verbal and visual world of artists, where words are often used as lines and colours, sensual but unapologetic if they leave the viewer dangling, frustrated, and unable to comprehend what she is experiencing. As an artist I do appreciate the necessity of artists to forge into inexplicable territories, to remain there and silently speak in an artistic language that is incomprehensible to many. There is value in this exploration. However, as an art educator, I do not stay there but move into the threshold of art and art education: I open possibilities for learning by making art and I talk about it in educational terms. One methodological challenge is to arbitrate these distinct theoretical registers effectively so that the collection of conversations and cloth leaves the viewer/reader with some further openings for learning, but also poises her on the edge of her philosophical seat.

Too much formulaic explanation of a post-structural theory deflates the very point of it, for then I would have made it into the very entity that many of these philosophers and writers abhor – tradition. Ironically, as I include their thoughts, I do my part to create such traditions. However, in their methods these scholars move alternatively from Western metaphysics, (the tradition of their time) with their delving into metaphor, literary edginess, and textual play of paradox and aporia. These ideas have a tendency to shift and morph if touched. I find in this slipperiness a certain elusive and enticing power as an artist/researcher/teacher. I proceed by wrapping and rewrapping my thoughts into words, places, and cloths. I approach art education at a cryptic angle: still recognizable but the press of current, theoretical forays shift it toward socio-political and ontological considerations. Through the pieces of cloth I place, I land.

The research participants

I solicited potential participants for this study from art and educational communities with which I have been involved as an artist and teacher. While attending the Society for the Education through the Arts conference in Edmonton, Alberta in October 2005, I posted a call for participants and shared my planned inquiry with groups of art educators. I limited the potential participants based upon three criteria. Firstly, I restricted participants to those who had a committed artistic practice that involved an awareness of a sense of place. In other words, the artists made work with attentiveness to the land or environment. Secondly, I sought out artists who interacted in an educational way with the public. Thirdly, I looked for participants who showed enthusiasm for the project and could commit the necessary time to it. My solicitation for such participants at the conference and from within my artistic and educational circles resulted in three participants joining me in this inquiry.

Peter von Tiesenhausen



P. von Tiesenhausen. *Willow Ship*. Courtesy of the artist.

I met Peter Von Tiesenhausen at the conference. Peter was a guest speaker and I attended his presentation. As I sat in the darkened room watching his life unfold in the form of art projects, I recognized in his work a unique commitment to the land and to art. I was inspired by his threaded approach to life and art. Here was an artist who made work that directly and forcefully promoted his conservational, environmental values toward the land and yet, at the same time, the work moved far beyond this position in so many ways that it touched me at the very level of my

work moved far beyond this position in so many ways that it touched me at the very level of my existence. It was about his place in the land and yet it was also about me, and as I experienced his art it allowed me the space to contemplate my place in the world. This was special. This was a quality in the art that was profound.

I approached him and asked if he would be interested in working with me. Generously he expressed an interest, and through later correspondences Peter agreed to join me in the research. He is a mid-career artist with a successful resume of national and international exhibitions, themed on the materials of the land and on ecological concerns regarding industry. In preparation for exhibitions, Peter moves into a gallery site and begins to get a sense of the place. He then often sources out materials from the locality and proceeds to create his work without further preplanning. Because of his method, he comments aesthetically on the site at hand, as an “outsider” using “insider” materials. In this way, he positions his work as a threshold.

When I compare my artistic practice to that of Peter, something that helps me to locate my practice and his, I highlight one important difference between the ways that we work: scale of project is that difference. Peter is undaunted by large-scale works. Part of his life experience of working with large, mechanical equipment and the growing up on a farm, and perhaps by his gender have a role to play in his abilities to envision his work and manipulate materials on a large scale. I mentioned this and asked whether he was ever daunted by the size of his projects. He responded that he always was, but that it seemed the right way to proceed. There is a kind of artistic intuition very attuned to specific sites in the ways that he attends to his projects.

Robert Dmytruk



West Hill 12, oil on canvas by R. Dmytruk

I met Robert Dmytruk at the same conference. When I discussed my proposed research with him he expressed an interest. I later contacted him and he agreed to participate. Robert is a painter in oils and he finds this traditional method of creative inquiry rich with possibility. Often his inquiry leads him into a concern for formal characteristics of his paintings, such as line, colour, etc. While his materials do not deviate from those of a painter, within this limit Robert investigates a range of questions concerning art and life. Robert's work is similar to mine in the fact that we both have backgrounds as painters. While I have looked away from painting at various times in my art career, Robert has generally remained within the genre. Much of his oeuvre is landscape painting. He also moves into abstract and still life in various explorations. This traditional form of art-making is successful for Robert and he continues to exhibit in many local galleries.

In Robert's life, I recognized my own path over the years, a double path of teaching high school art and keeping a studio. He balances the two worlds and is highly capable in both realms as an artist and as an art teacher. He is an award-winning educator⁷ and has taught art to high school students for many years, including an International Baccalaureate program (IB in art education) that is an internationally based program that is highly demanding of both students and

education) that is an internationally based program that is highly demanding of both students and teachers. Recently Robert moved into the position of art consultant for his school board. When he mentioned the struggle he has felt at times to get to his studio due to his teaching commitments I immediately understood, having experienced the same difficulty over my educational and artistic career.

When Robert enters into the framed and referenced social sphere of the classroom, he sometimes asks his students to consider ethical implications of art-making processes through the invitation of practicing artists into his classroom. At times he instigates discussions that are relevant to an involved citizenry: issues such as care of the environment, and the appropriation of minority cultural images have been topics of dialogue.

Robert: You talk about the relationship of the student to the environment - to this place in the land - politically or socially - I use her [a white artist painting about a native reserve] as a reference when I talk to them, about choosing a motif or a place for your work. And I bring that up and we talk about it openly in the classroom ...

Nora [pseudonym for the artist] has lectured to my students whether or not it is her place to make comment on that. Can she honestly do it when she is just flying in (well, she was there for a year) – and flying out again?

Interview #2.

While he looks to the development of students' creative expression, he is not only interested in this aspect of art education. At times, Robert engages his students with current social issues through art practices but insists that they interpret social issues from a very personal space so that they are reflective about their connection to the issue at hand.

Robert: It is a difficult situation [how do you teach those difficult subjects - pornography, censorship, appropriation – those kinds of sensitive issues in depth] ... Sheila, another student I once had, [was] very much into the Holocaust and her whole life seemed to be tied to the Holocaust. A brilliant writer, honest... she writes from her soul and does not hold anything back. Her paintings - I did not censor them but I had to turn them. I had to be very careful with them. She had painted several paintings of Hitler in his youth that looked just like German Expressionist paintings but they were [all of] Hitler. And then she painted him very yellow with breasts and then she painted him... as Olympia.

Interview #2

Although Robert is aware of the political issues within art, he values the students' experiential expression within a critique about their world.

Pat Beaton



P. Beaton. *Untitled*. Lift prints on gampi paper 2x3" each. Detail.

The third participant came to join the project somewhat differently. I solicited Pat Beaton from the artistic community in Vancouver, British Columbia. I was familiar with her work and had known Pat for many years in Vancouver before I moved to Alberta. I met Pat fifteen years ago while sharing studio space at the Malaspina Printmakers Co-operative⁸ in Vancouver. We were both printing at that time, working and living within the same artistic community. Within her art, Pat's materials vary depending upon the project, but a common thread throughout entails images of animals and women. She is one of the more experienced artists who work in community art in Vancouver, but her community projects are informed by a very rich, artistic practice that is very personal. She has also had extensive experience teaching drawing and printmaking to children. Pat conducts her classes in various art galleries and community centers throughout the city. Because she has never taught within the K-12 system, she comes to her teaching from the position of the artist. For example, since evaluation is not part of her relationship with her students in these classes, she focuses on the process of exploring with materials and imagination with the students. I was curious about this difference. I asked her to

join me in the study because of her extensive community experience, the variety of teaching experiences she has had, and the subject matter of her art.

So three artists, two from Edmonton - my new home, and one from Vancouver, my old home, began with me a series of interviews concerning art, teaching, and a sense of place. It is important for my aesthetic inquiry into the ways that subjectivity is connected to place that I have representation from a place that is familiar, Vancouver, and one that is new, Edmonton. Much of my project moves within the threshold of time with regard to place through tacit autobiographical reflection.

The artists' interest in landscape art drew me to them. Robert's focus on traditional landscape painting, and his juggling of the two roles of artist and high school art educator; Peter's interest in works made about and in the environment, and his pedagogical role as artist; and Pat's reflection of rural spaces lost to urban development, and her experience working in community art created a broad range of potential situations in which artist/educators practice. Talking to the participants about their particular experiences gives me an array of positions against which I can juxtapose theoretical considerations and my personal perspective. Each artist could be considered an expert in her/his field. All three artists are public figures, experienced as artists and/or teachers, and have chosen to use their real names in the study. The art is recognizable by their viewing public. Therefore, to use pseudonyms would result in confusion for readers who might be unable to connect the artist with the art that they know. At times, I claim knowledge about a work of art but in discussion, the participants who have made the art reclaim meaning. In these conversations I, as a/r/tographer, become student. Occasionally, the pieces of art that I recognize become more unrecognizable during our interviews. These are memorable moments of learning.

The interview process

We are our relationships. We are nothing other than our relationships – with each other, with the world.

Heesoon Bai (2003, p. 23)

To attempt to know what one is doing when one sets up an interview relationship is, first of all, to seek to know the effects one may unwittingly produce by that kind of always slightly arbitrary intrusion inherent in social exchange.

Pierre Bourdieu, (1999, p. 608, Italics in original)

My work is shaped by conversations. I conduct three semi-structured interviews with each participant. Approximately one month apart in duration, the interviews consist of travelling to the artists' sites, either to their studios, homes, or both. Thus, the interviews are very site-specific. I am curious about these participating artists' reasons behind the selections of places they deem special or important. I question them as to the ways that these places inform their work. I want to know how they see their roles as artists and/or educators within their larger communities, focused as they are on the theme of the land and/or nature in their art. By questioning them, I begin to interrogate reasons behind my artistic interest in the land and the ways that my identity is complicated by my special places. I begin to examine my roles as artist, researcher, and teacher. Within our artistic experimentation, narrative, and reflection there may be spaces where others can benefit as they recognize aspects of their lives in these images and words. Shifts in one's value system can seldom be done consciously or quickly, but can alter with encounters that surprise in many ways: emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. Art and the land are two openings into awareness that lived conditions in our places are fueled by values, and that these values are potentially adjustable.

The study is based on the places selected by the participants. They are artists who contemplate the social implications of living in the land, in cities, and in rural places. As a frame for my artistic adjustment from watercolour painting to a different way of making art about the land, I am curious about these artist/educators' values. Do they rupture our collective assumptions about our national home? Do they have something to teach me about the land and about the roles of artists as teachers of an alternative kind? How does the role of high school art teacher interact with that of landscape painter?

At times throughout the gathering of the interviews for this research I faltered. This is evidence of a certain uneven ability that is a mark of a neophyte researcher. Despite my doubts, through the artists' insights I look for greater clarity in the small, unspoken connections we make with each other that become key to understanding much of our dialogue. By thinking of the interview as a co-produced performance, I analyze my role in evaluating, deciphering, and manipulating the artists' musings. Because I interview each participant three times, I slowly develop a rapport with each artist/educator over time. In order to talk relatively freely about personal values within their art practices, trust needed to build between us. Repeated encounters can avoid what Silverman (2001, p. 87) calls the "one shot" interview that can potentially distort final analyses. In this study, the choice of three meetings was a successful strategy. The first interview broke the ice as we got to know each other through talk about our art, our families, and our school experiences as students and/or teachers. Our values filtered through objects, paint, cloth, and landscapes.

The second interview involved more in-depth discussions where we focused on various aspects of art-making and educating, and commenced a collaboration involving the placement of the fabric. By the third interview, we had established a friendly, collegial rapport based on an emerging trust. We proceeded to retrieve the cloths and discuss them formally and metaphorically, with regard to significance of place to self, to art, and to education. We continually considered if and how changes in our artistic and/or educational practices had occurred during the placement and retrieval of the cloth.

The participants used the interview process as a departure from which they could reflect on their artistic and teaching practices, and in all cases, each respondent was affected by our talks. This was discussed in the third meeting. By being interviewed and later, by reviewing the transcripts of our conversations, the participants found the experience very helpful as a form of reflective development. As Peter commented, "it was a pleasure to do this and read it again because I am trying to figure out what it is that I am doing and I actually talk about it all the time, but seldom see it in writing. This clarifies a lot of things for me" (personal correspondence, January 14, 2007). The participants had positive experiences and valued the time taken to verbally express their artistic processes within a deep inquiry over a series of meetings.

It was important that the participants' artistic practices were mature and complex, and their experiences in formal and/or informal teaching situations were well established. Because the artists and I were socially equivalent, there was a relatively high level of understanding throughout the encounters. After our initial interview, a growing rapport was established with the

two participants who were new to me, Robert Dmytruk and Peter von Tiesenhausen. I knew the third artist, Pat Beaton, well before the research. The question with Pat was whether our established relationship overly distorted the interview process. I discovered that because we were more familiar with each other initially, we could move to personal issues quickly. In those interviews, I tended to interrupt more frequently. While this reflects the nature of a more “real” conversation, possible distortions may have unknowingly occurred.

My main concern was whether I had asked enough revealing questions in each progressive interview, but when I considered all nine interviews in total, I realized that details of life stories, art-making processes, and values had all been included in varying degrees. All of these areas were topical for my research.

The participants become involved as a/r/tographers with me on a small yet significant scale when they place and retrieve the pieces of cloth, and deliberate about important places through the positioning of the cotton. When I am not there the artists/educators contemplate the placement of the cloths. In one instance, with fire, Pat Beaton elaborately orchestrates a performance art piece, while other participants acknowledge their parts in the totality of the project. Because we are all experienced with the motility and flexibility of working on art projects with/among other people, this is not a difficult stretch for any of us, to entangle and disentangle in an a/r/tographical flow. I too place and retrieve cloth, although I create art from all of the pieces of fabric, and continue to deliberate on the significance of all aspects of the project. Thus, we mull over the same questions with regard to artistic practices, teaching, and place. Our conversations are filtered through these chosen places, and shaped by our curiosity regarding the ways that our locations have influenced our lives.

However, the interpretation of participants does not mean we are engaged with the study equally. I, as researcher, remain the most committed to the endeavour, and therefore there are important differences among us. I open our conversations and guide them with questions concerning issues that I identify as important. The relationship between researcher and participants is evident in these important aspects, and I recognize the ways that I influence and shape data.

Methodological doubt quietly niggles my scholarly confidence as I continually question whether the interview data really opens spaces in my research where I can examine the role of art with regard to political will at the level of self and community. Silverman (2001) urges me to seek an underlying meaning in the interview discourses, but at the same time, I take his advice and am careful not to obfuscate more than I reveal in the creation of conceptual models that I

meld with the data. This is especially pertinent as I engage with ontological tangents of space and place.

I am cognizant, especially in the context of artists talking about their practices, as experts, that there is the potential for a romanticism to colour my analysis by perceiving the participants' comments and artistic expression as a form of authentic, personal articulation (Silverman, 2001). While this has been seen as a detriment in the use of interviews as research data (ten Have, 2004), in this study where collaborative, artistic cooperation is a component of this a/r/tographical research, the fact that we collaborate to construct meaning about who we are in these places, as artists, as members of communities, and as educators is not antithetical to the research process.

The interviews open spaces for the artists to tell their life stories and as they describe events and the art that they have made, the words and gestures they use influence how I understand their art. It indirectly echoes in my decisions about manipulating the cloths. In investigating oral histories, Blunt (2003) notes that it is necessary to situate the particularities of the interviewee's story with broader discussions about representation of identity, memory, and experiences. This is in keeping with my commitment toward a greater understanding of how artists' interpretations of place can shake us out of our entrenched places.

Each comment in our conversations is coloured by a tacit agreement that we are making a social event and in doing so, we are re/creating our selves. A/r/tographical sharing is very evident in the interviews because of the way that we approach the videotaping as creative performance. This interpretation of the collaboration as "active interviewing", where the process of conversation creates meaning, is as important as the number and nature of questions asked (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This becomes clearer to me as I review our conversations. The video camera seems to intensify this quality.



Video Still: Interview with P. Beaton

In creating video interviews, I am curious about the effect that the addition of this technology would have on our nascent and/or established relationships. Pink (2004) notes an ethical concern that arises with video: control of the interviewee's performance must remain with the participant and not be exploited for the sake of the research. While this is a legitimate concern with any form of representation, video seems to exacerbate this potential because of its immediacy. It is a significant way to structure an interview because it allows interviewees a platform where they publicly shape personas (Ibid). Video is an especially important way of interviewing artists because it not only captures their artwork, but also offers a creative way of interacting and building a unique rapport based on artistic sharing of creative gesture.

It is impossible to translate every nuance and meaning inherent in the information due to the depth and breadth of audio-visual data. There are too many registers and therefore, I seek to transcribe the interviews based on the theoretical structures that interest me in this dissertation (Rose, 2000). In particular, this entails discussions about the process of making art, the sites, the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of art as political commentary, and the potency of the artist as educator.

Thus, I choose to use video in an unusual manner that deviates from the ethnographic approaches with which it is often currently used in research. While video influences the ways that people represent themselves publicly, I embrace this phenomenon with these artists. I record the performances of the interviews as creative acts. Video as a form of art is familiar to all of the participants and all three are culturally confident enough to artistically play with the gaze. Thus, the ways that we communicate with each other through the camera is as poignant as the words shared. Upon reviewing the interviews that were recorded on video, the camera angles and foci on hands and backs speaks to an artistic undertaking that was implicitly understood by all three artists. The participants reveal a sophisticated understanding of the ways that language and image interact. In this instance, the videos explore a very rich matrix of visual and aural impressions.

In spite of this, video as a medium of communication, while adding a layered, creative element to the interview, also allows the participant to hide as well as reveal in a material/visual context (Pink, 2004). Thus, I am tuned to the possible empty or missing gestures while viewing and using the tapes as data. As I move into deeper philosophical musing, this analysis becomes more difficult than I initially anticipated because it leads me to consider the questions I have missed, and/or the answers that have been truncated.

In the case of these artists, the inclusion of video as a creative process lessens any stress that they may have had with the “straight interview”. While there may have been a period of adjustment for non-artists to become comfortable in front of a video camera during a research interview, the opposite became evident in my research. Our conversations were understood to be part of the creative inquiry. This is clear in the positive ways that all three participants approached the idea of videotaping.

The video camera, as a tool for data collection, is usually a very different tool in art-making. In this project, this boundary is blurred, as data becomes raw material for creative and aesthetic inquiry. The constant shuffle back and forth between real time and taped time is potent with meanings that can be shaped in various ways to trouble the questions I raise in this dissertation. This is tempered by my responsibilities as researcher to convey the comments of my interviewees as closely as I can to their original meanings.

Twisting data and spreading it out

I do not simply collect and gather data, but rather, the art emerges through a variety of activities fueled by the information. I interview as a collaborative act of video art and conversation: I create art from the cloth and I seek inspiration for my creative practice at the edges of the participants' words and gestures. In their ruminations about places and in their art, I look for random thoughts rather than categories, words that form nodes from which I can coax an understanding of other possibilities. It is disordered, perplexing work. Some connections among the ideas and art are elusive but intriguing, so I am encouraged to continue. I alternate between a vague understanding of tendrils of philosophical connections to these artists' works and to the cloth, and sparks of direct and uncomplicated association. I succumb to catachresis and use the results to catalyze ideas. I mezzotint thoughts into varying shades of theoretical gray, and absolute black fades as I scratch and mark on the surfaces of cloth. A surfeit of cotton in the garage and I become temporarily overwhelmed and bounded: wrapped and knotted. All of these directions for creating my research are occurring at close to simultaneous, circular flows.

One concern is the very writing and art that I make for this project creates foundation in the telling. I would, then, be in error because I try to create a flow rather than a point in time. It can be assumed, in the traditional dissertation research, that my intention is to tell all, cover all angles, and exhaust all possibilities concerning my topic. But if I claim to do so, not only would I be enormously smug, but also I would be wrong, for I would have closed off the very opening that I wish to create. I read Davis' (2001, p. 141) description of the point of writing and keep it in my mind, to be melded with my art materials: "It [the thesis] indicates not power or knowledge or mastery but naked vulnerability. To state one's thesis is to risk oneself, to open toward others; it is to initiate an approach, an encounter, a becoming". I run these crowded yet anonymous pieces of cloth over my hands, through my fingers, and as I touch them, I consider the influence of place. I think about multiple metaphors in cloth and the acts of manipulating fabric in relation to my endeavours as teacher and artist.

The cloths become dirty, worn, and soft. Fragile.



... around the city it is all so loaded...

Pat Beaton Interview #1

The wind howls up there. It has its own name... its own personality, its mysterious origins and reasons for being. In the Spring and again in Autumn it is so strong it bowls you over. Makes you crazy, they say. Can we imagine a state, a religion, or a community bound to remembrance, which would have the courage or craziness to call a wind a monument?

Michael Taussig, 2006, p. 30

Crowded wind and calculating the speed of a running coyote: Taking place

As I focus on the second cloth that Robert lay in his garden, exposed for six weeks to the elements, I foreground wind, one element I can't see. When I moved from the mountains to the flat prairie, I never anticipated how much the wind would bother me. It is so strong here, and I see evidence of it in the video images of this cloth. Wind, like information, relentlessly circles and patterns my body and my world. So I begin to consider the places far away from me, and the ways that the wind and my art connect me to distant others. The participating artists' work circulates globally but is situated locally. Socially aware artists have creatively used this kind of borderless movement of information as a way to critique their local places. By investigating the mobility of people, images, and ideas, I see the potential for social transformation through cultural networks. Wind circulates and I wonder who else has been touched by the wind that sweeps this cloth around. Where has this wind been?

Taking my cue from this prairie wind rushing over canola and sandy soil, I acknowledge the need to conceptually realign cultural borders of nationalism so that the porous nature of local, national, and global landscapes, demanded by this wind, is highlighted within our psychological collective. Rural and urban divides seem greater than country demarcations, despite nationalistic icons that perpetuate solid, national unification. I unfold these layers of meaning within the term landscape art. With the Group of Seven painters, I indicate one way that a social imaginary of nationalism tied to colonialism, and to limited, physical borders, is subtly perpetuated in Canada through landscape images and art education. Pat Beaton reminds me that landscape is seen and interpreted differently, depending upon one's perception.

Pat: I think I am kind of interested in what my response to the land - landscape is – a situation. I don't know if I'd even describe it as landscape because it is urban as well. You're looking out here and seeing trees - and how I respond to that whole huge, fake grey mountain they're building over there [indicating urban city outside window] because [it] is growing and growing, and changing all the time -this whole city thing, right? Condos – stacking them up. Then when I go from this kind of situation into the back of a mountain or something. I'm responding to that -“I don't know what I'm doing here!” It takes a while for that adjustment and I like looking at that adjustment. That shift. My eyes focus at a different length. There are a whole lot of things that happen.

Interview #1

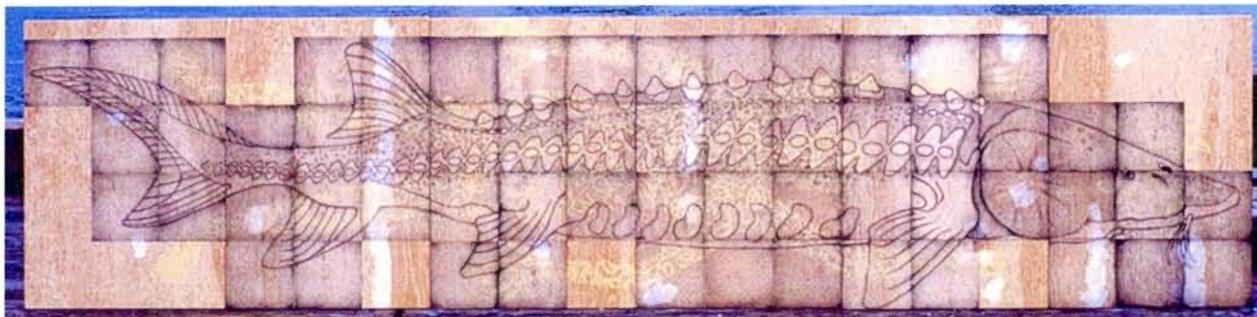
The wind travels through rural and urban spaces indiscriminately. I live on the edge of an urban/rural divide. A short walk down two alleyways: through an opening in a fence, and the urban suburb morphs into a large farmland. My children and I follow the wind to the edge of the farm one day in autumn, a cold, blue ceiling of sky wrapping down around us. Without clouds of any kind, the only indication of this sullen, constant press of wind is its force on our skin. A coyote lopes beside us, out in the middle of the farm, going our way. For the distant length of this rural, open space it moves along with us, as wary of our brightly coloured coats as I am of its camouflage. I continually judge how far my young son strays from my reach and try to calculate how fast the coyote can run. We all try out our coyote howls, and my youngest rolls the new word, “co-yo-tee”, around and around in his sing-song play of language. The coyote leaps, leaving the ground and pouncing down on some unsuspecting animal. The surprise of the hunt is masked as play in my children’s eyes. Their thoughts do not take them toward death for rabbits. Bunny deaths that we leap over. I haven’t really given much consideration to the quiet animal world that exists within our urban and rural places, yet it is a vital part of community of the land. Pat Beaton recognizes this in her art.



Sturgeon House. by Pat Beaton. Mixed media.

I am remembering a large, cotton tent that Pat made, hand-printed with images of sturgeon and coyotes. It was built as a huge lantern, lit from inside, viewed from the urban, green spaces

around the city. She set up the tent on locations of old riverbeds and estuaries, thereby marking the hidden places, covered over now by industry and industrious park managers. In the shifting of the salt and freshwater borders, the water seeks curves downhill, following shaped landscapes unnoticed in networks of culverts, bridges, roads, and sidewalks. One evening we stand staring at the lit images of these animals while the silent coyotes circle behind us, cautious of our scent and shadows. Coyotes and coyote images surround us, reterritorializing the park into a hunting ground full of rabbits, raccoons, and other critters. Taking back urban space. Taking place.



Sturgeon. Collagraph Print on paper mounted plywood by P. Beaton. 30 x 120 inches.

Pat: The coyote and the sturgeon are almost opposite because human activity attracts the coyote and makes space for the coyote, and human activity is making the sturgeon population decline... With the sturgeon work, I very carefully picked animals and plants and insects that you would find on the Fraser River now, like when I did the project in the early 90s, because I didn't want to do something about extinction or romanticizing the wilderness. I just wanted to create a marker for what that time was. So the sturgeon, at that time, were having a really difficult time and the coyotes were increasing: and they are both on the tent, and both being affected by human activity. So maybe a kazillion years from now that will be a piece about extinction or not, but for the time that I made it, it was a marker for what existed there.

Interview #2

The idea of a stationary border has been shredded by metaphorical winds, as urban and rural limits become enigmatic thresholds that shift with night and day; with coyote and sturgeon; with land and water. The wind, such smooth space⁹, ignores any demarcations and my movements with the cloths mimic wind force. In doing so, I touch both urban and rural, and this elusive threshold becomes the metaphor of movement, as I whip the cloth and whirl it over the ground repeatedly, twisting it and rolling it, following gestures of wind gusts.



Sturgeon House by P. Beaton, daylight view.

Robert Dmytruk has placed one cloth over the frozen ground that covers his patch of garden - the rural space of his back yard. It is a very small space, surrounded by a busy back alley and framed by fence on both sides.

Robert: When I went to the lake, a lot of the drawing and painting I did - it was rural and it wasn't me - I am an urban person. I live in the city and I have a small plot of land which is mine and I guess that is my rural-ness - a small piece of soil out there. So it was important that I had brought it [the cloth] into the city after searching for places to put it.

Interview #3

A gate isolates this garden from the pavement outside. For Robert, moving to this urban space from his larger, suburban home is exemplified in the value he places on this little garden. But the wind commands here, not him. The cloth is tugged and turned repeatedly with each gust. Demanding wind that knows no urban/rural border, it invades gardens and cloth. The fitful movements of cloth seem like futile, random gestures, but each gesture is a reminder of the ways that elements of the land dictate this project.

As Robert folds the cloth to return it to me after six weeks of wind, we scour the surface of the cloth for evidence of this busy wind crowding out the garden surfaces that he had intended to cover. The cloth is in a knot in the end, whipped and rolled and defeated. Changed. The ground remains hard and frozen. He folds the cloth gently, carefully, as if he is handling a delicate,

foreign prize and not a large rag, worn out from the weather. In this small gesture he honours our relationship in making art from his chosen place. I acknowledge the potential for wind to shape cloth. I acknowledge its power to shape my creative flow of ideas.



Untitled, oil on canvas by R. Dmytruk

Pat: And then a big thunderstorm rolls over the whole thing and everything changes. And that lack of control is a big reminder. No control. And I really, really enjoy that. I don't enjoy it if it is threatening me - or people who I know, but it is just a huge reminder of how things really work. That humans go on thinking they can control all these things and you see something like a thunderstorm that isn't controllable and it just puts it all in perspective. Humans are here for a while and humans will be gone.

Interview #1

For the participants, the scale of space shifts and becomes smaller from the rural to the urban experience. The sense of control that we feel within urban places is eroded when we are confronted with the power of the natural elements, yet nature is so vulnerable to human activity.

Within the activity of this project, the ways that the participants and I negotiate the spaces of specific contexts is an important aspect of placing the cloths. For me it is also an important aspect of creating art. It is in such embodiments that I experiment with the kind of freedom that open, rural distances afford me. Crowded urban places at times constrict my abilities to create these cloths as a form of landscape art. I am not alone in my awareness of the ways that open spaces expand the landscape while smaller ones contain it.

Pat:

...I was really confounded since you left about what to do with the fabric. They are large pieces and I really wanted to place one here in the city. That is when I ran into that old sense of urban constriction. Where in a city can I lay a large piece of fabric and let time and weather play with it? At first I wanted to spread it out flat. I was frustrated at the lack of space that I felt I could do something like this in ... Undisturbed. I felt like my arms were tied to my body. That to live and work here in urban land I had to continually make myself small. Perhaps this is true.

Personal correspondence. May 23, 2006

However, Robert Dmytruk has a different interpretation of the urban and rural divide when he thinks about the influences of places on his life and work. He has had experiences with both kinds of spaces and describes another relationship with place and the land.

Robert: My place and my relationship to the urban environment and the work, although not urban, certainly has urban influences to me, if that makes sense. But certainly there are overtones of noise and busy mark-making - excitement for me.

Interview #2

While her urban environment sometimes limits Pat, Robert finds inspiration in the busy noisiness of crowded cities. Through a sense of place, different interpretations lead to specific ways of thinking about the connection between place and self, and between place and making art about the land. Other boundaries shift also, as influences from the urban attach to the rural and so too the reverse. As Pat notes, it is about the sense of losing grounding, and thus, loosening expectations in the shifting between the rural and the urban.

What of these edges, the shared urban/rural spaces inhabited by coyote and moved through by indiscriminant wind disregarding everything human? In her photographs of the Alberta badlands and the urban sprawl at the edges of cities, Isabelle Hayeur focuses on the "invisible part of a landscape, the part we don't usually see" (Redfern, 2006, p. 48). She has visually essayed the ways that the threshold of urban and rural living is the location of political contestation. The difficulties of sharing the land are most profoundly exposed in her photography and the unsettling sense of overlapping intentions with regard to the land remind me of the forgetfulness that envelops me the more familiar I become with such thresholds. Art that takes issue within such political sites of difference has the ability to shake my awareness from my usual patterns of negotiating space and place.

For Robert Dmytruk, his creative play in the ways that his rural memories and his urban

sensibilities collide and collude is a source of inspiration for him.

Robert:

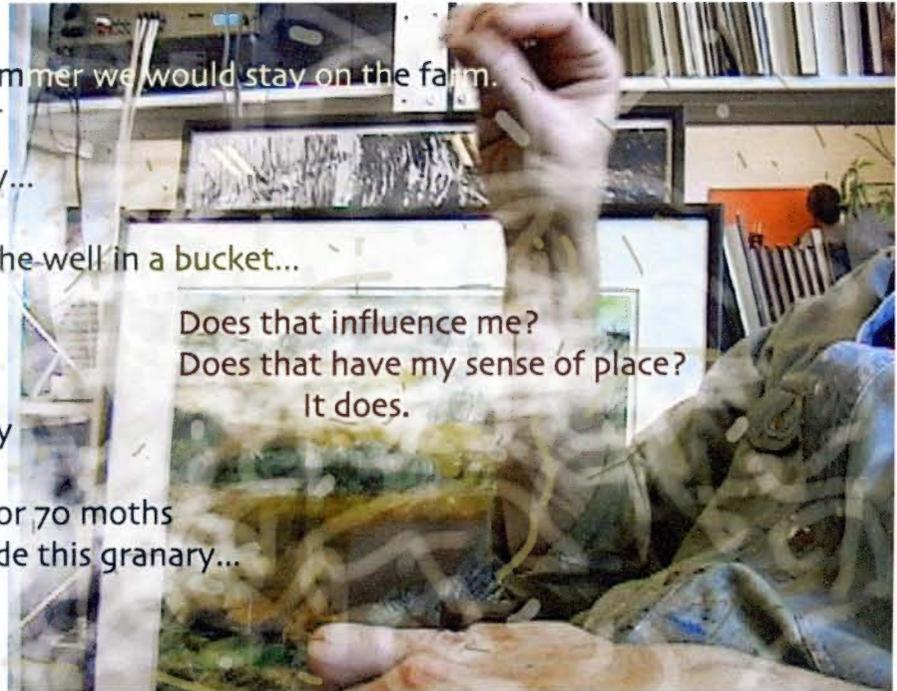
Every weekend (and) summer we would stay on the farm.
So I knew...those are my roots...

... there was no electricity...
no fridge,
butter at the bottom of the well in a bucket...

I think back...
Going to sleep in a granary

And the moths...50 or 60 or 70 moths
Just circling this lamp inside this granary...

because, you know...
kids went to the granary.



Does that influence me?
Does that have my sense of place?
It does.

Like Robert, from my childhood experiences I sometimes carry memories of rural encounters that affect how I perceive urban environments. I have yet to completely understand the implications of this split. It is ironic that the chiasm can sometimes be greater between a rural student and an urban one in the same classroom and nation, than between two students from different parts of the world. The globalization of the local is evident in this kind of commonality shared by children through cyberspace.

Circulations: Local / national / global

In all social registers, urban and rural communities are becoming further disenfranchised. In trying to understand the various permutations of my embodiment in local, lived experiences at the borders of rural and urban places, and my subjectivity within this nation and the world, I acknowledge the tensions that exist among global activities and issues regarding the sharing of the physical landscape. This global relationship within the development of local and national communities will continue to be adjudicated through various forms of media, where images will tug and tear at perceptions of our selves through others' interpretations of international events (Hall, 2000).

However, moving from urban or rural to global introduces another scale, and with technology, this movement has become increasingly seamless. I pause and make an effort to consider the ways my body feels in rural space, urban space, and cyberspace. It is within the thresholds of difference among these places of my attention that are notably confusing because there is a spontaneity and simultaneity to all three places that feels slightly schizophrenic. Yet, here too is a source of creative play, when the elements of art-making become challenging on levels that are not socially and politically sutured to any one place.

Wind is an essentially global force because of its speed and ephemeral nature. I use it as a metaphor for local, national, and global circulations of information. Political and social boundaries between the national and the global are always shifting as difference continually recreates our national fabric. Yet hegemonic claims to one idea of nation continue to erode the possibility for greater social justice. This is because understanding within difference is not given a proper place when who we are as a nation has already been decided.

The term, globalization, in the past fifteen years has been theorized in many ways. There have been discordant views of what globalization entails, but Martín-Barbero's (2000, p. 36, italics in original) description is helpful: he states, "What 'globalization' means is no longer *invasions* but transformations produced from and within the national and even the local sphere". The significance of understanding the global in this way is to acknowledge the porous reality of imagined borders among local, national, and global parties. But what does the local sphere mean? It is a very different environment between a local rural and a local urban one. While much discussion has been centered around scales of local, national, and global borders, or of urban/rural divides, the connections among all of these places or spaces has much potential for considering social transformation (Bloom, 2003). A nationality base upon imaginary wilderness,

and a country like Canada, that is primarily rural in physicality but urban in mentality, is a rich source for this kind of inquiry. The threshold of the urban and rural locales touches contexts that are national and global. This flexibility of scale informs how our performances within one sphere are registered in others. Thus, the relationship between place and self is a co-constitutive one, where place is affected by self and self by place (Casey, 2001). Yet, our feeling of belonging is no longer tied to one place. Kostash (2000) notes that as our sense of place becomes unstable and deterritorialized, one resulting effect of this phenomenon is the way that the generation of youth, especially urban youth, come to being through virtual places as well as their physical places.

With the proliferation of electronic media (Kostash, 2000; Rogoff, 2000; Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996) these boundaries demarcating our places of belonging shift. We live in conceptual homes that Chowder, (2002) describes as “homelessness within the self” (p. 5). As we physically move about the globe with increased frequency and ease, and as the technologies of telecommunication have extended our subjectivities from one place to everywhere, it seems natural for wealthy North American citizens to conceive of themselves as global citizens (Kymlicka, 2003). Groups are no longer contained by national borders. Alliances and loyalties based upon ethnicity, shared history, or political position can take precedence over national allegiances to create “nations” in cyberspace. Global discourses do not influence from the outside but are forms of knowledge that circulate and are localized within specific contexts (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001).

This kind of nomadic nation is often recognized and acknowledged through cultural work. Rather than simply registering as a form of entertainment in the ways that artists manipulate visual culture, art is an opportunity to reflect on our global connections within the local, and to highlight our complacency in the creation of global injustices within our local places (Sethi, 2002). Art that is concerned about issues concerning shared spaces such as those in the land finds a global venue in such instances¹⁰.

How our relations with others in different registers influence social change is difficult to document, but because the connections in one sphere have possibilities and consequences for other spheres, I recognize that social change can happen at local levels that shape national and global situations, and visa versa. The flexibility of visual culture as a form of knowledge circulation can work to rupture existing social structures. Artists can exploit the power in visual culture through the shifting meanings of images. Sense of agency is one complication that can coax openings within white cotton, conversation, and narrative in this study. Here, the landscape

art that I make simultaneously refers to the places selected by the participating artists, the physical scene outside my garage, and a global vision.

Visual culture, nevertheless, can also work to perpetuate the dominant cultural discourse that creates the myth of national identity, thus limiting who we are as a nation, and assuming by default, the neoliberal subject position. Images become national, cultural icons that are constructed and function within a society in a number of contexts. MacKenzie (2004) notes that images are powerful tools that build icons that support national identity because of our tendency to equate seeing with knowing. Burnett suggests that viewing images is a deeply personal and powerful activity that is quietly active and influential along side obvious dominant discourses.

A claim can be made that the image has no ontological validity unless and until the archival, metaphorical, and virtual qualities of the image have been fully explored. This moves the process of interpretation beyond the “first” look of an image and requires a shift into the labyrinth of metaphor. This process in no way removes the image from its emotional impact. In fact, a significant part of the communication process remains silent, without words, and is not dependent upon the discourse that is applied to the image. (Burnett, 2004, p. 37)



Cloth from *Wind* (Detail).

photo credit: Monica Emme

In tracing how images affect us, it becomes clear that they are important on very profound, emotional levels. In the national context, the repetition of certain images, such as landscape images, affects us on personal levels. The sense of belonging that ensues creates the social imaginaries of national identity in influential ways. The arts are particularly well suited to

developing these emotions and allegiances. In the research context, the visual is unique, in that images can excavate tacitly held beliefs in personal ways that are the underpinnings of identity (Grauer, 1998; Pente, 2002). Thus, visuals created with our imaginations, influenced as they are from culture, are key in forming the conditions for learning about our collective social biases and discriminations.

It is the semiotic nature of images that various meanings are layered onto what we see. Consequently, no image can embody only one meaning. In this way they are continually sliding in meaning, and are ultimately unknowable. Therefore, to use a single set of images to represent oneself or one's country is fraught with difficulty and contradiction. The descriptors that distinguish uniqueness, or identity, are constantly being blurred, mixed, and remixed (MacKenzie, 2004).

In activist art, the social critique that encompasses and considers the various scales of community can do much to inform, upset, and/or trigger awareness of the ways that art educators wittingly or unwittingly perpetuate solid borders and substantial national identities. Landscape artists, such as the participants in this project, are aware of the ways that their work, while site-specific, also circulates as part of the global, visual culture, reinforcing the transparency of borders among local, national, and global spheres. The misguided idea of nationalism as a romantic isolationism often accompanies attempts to fix national, collective identity to a singular type of landscape image such as wilderness views. Laidlaw, Davis, & Sumara (2001), and Chambers (1999), upon noting the multiple and ambiguous influences of the land upon our national psyche, propose that our educational institutions, and specifically our curricula, look to difference ways of representing who we are, in relation to where we are. Landscape is always more than a physical vista.



Cloth manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

Landscape: Beyond the view



Cloth from Wind manipulated by author.

photo credit: Monica Emme

The literature regarding landscape describes the concept in a number of ways which cross a number of disciplines, including art, education, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, sociology, and architecture. A general theme throughout these investigations is the relationship of people to the land and to each other in the land (Cosgrove, 1984). Thus, landscape, while referring to a view of physical surroundings, is also understood as a site of cultural and political relationships within a society. The importance of community within these understandings is key (Chambers, 1999; Gill, 2002; Miller, 1995; Mitchell, 1994; Probyn, 1990; Raine, 1996; Wilson, 1991). Etymologically, the early uses of the term landscape associated with a view or scenery within Western culture is in the early seventeenth century with references to *landtschap* in the context of painting (Simpson, 1997). Also, the Dutch *landskip* evolves to landscape and refers directly to the art of painting scenery. It still retains that meaning, as images play an important part in the development of the land. Also, the link between mapping and the land suggests the importance of imagery in comprehending the land. We inevitably think spatially with mapping metaphors when we think of landscape (MacGregor, 2003).

While existing as an art genre, landscape is also a discourse that emulates values and attitudes (Thomas, 1999; Wilson, 1991). There are moral codes that can be read in the landscape that has traditionally been elitist (Dowler, Carubia, & Szczygiel, 2005). According to Mitchell (1994), landscape is the site of cultural practice and an instrument of power. Following this

interpretation, Osborne (2001, p. 8) suggests, “Values of the dominant culture expressed are symbolized in visual form of landscape”.

It is this process that gives rise to the history of one group acting as representative for all groups within the society (Bhabha, 1994; Hitchison, 2004). Thus, power relations become entwined with representations of the land. In this way, forms of landscape art play important roles in the continual shaping of national identity. Darby (2000) notes, “Landscape became a locus of identity formation by virtue of how it was read about, toured through, experienced, viewed physically or in print, spoken about and painted” (p. 72). Collective, social imaginaries include the place of memory: the landscape.

Mitchell (1994, p. 2) comments, “Landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of exchange, a site of visual appropriation [and] a focus for the formation of identity”. Indeed, the terms, landscape and landscape art are fraught with difficulties because of their contested histories in the Western European tradition. As New (1997) queries, “Why is it...that people treat the land as protector, or as cloak, or a comforter? Why and in what ways do they consider it theirs?” (p. 5). Land ownership is often affirmed through cultural representations such as landscape images. However, artists also contest established land ownership and draw attention to the fact that a larger interest is at stake when considering sharing the land.

The strong connection of landscape to the subject is damaged by the gendered ways we think about the land. It informs a social imaginary that unconsciously assumes a masculine position. Darby (2000) sums up a male privileging in landscape art nicely with her list: militaristic and male gaze is consistently evident in most topographical work, mapping, and exploration; early promoters of landscape tourism were male; art critics and artists were mostly male; and the art market was determined by men.

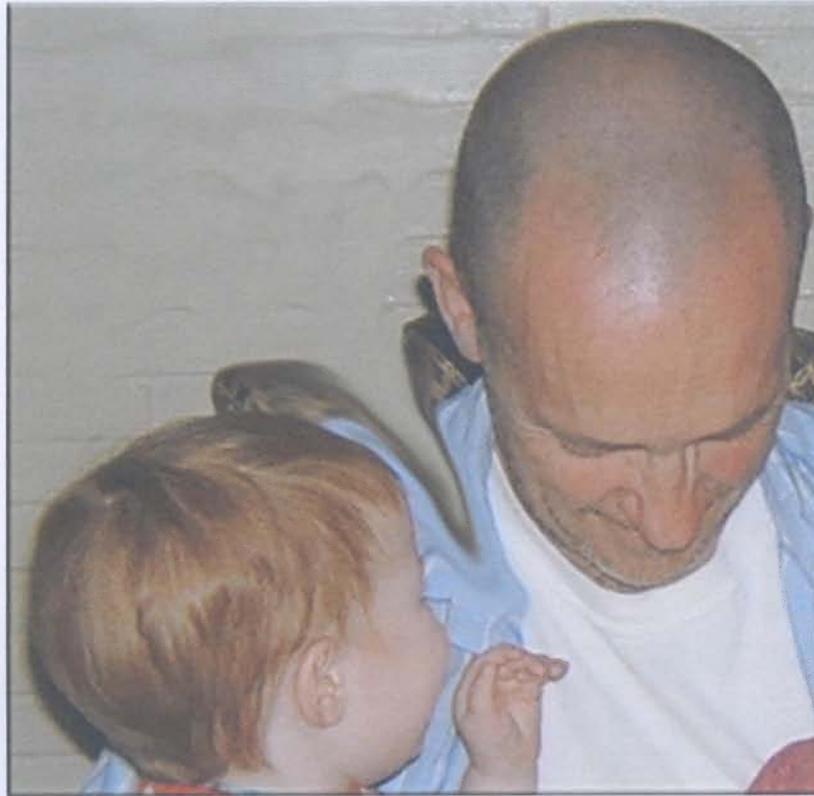
Furthermore, in nineteenth and twentieth century America, this privileging of the male gaze is noted in the correlation of a wilderness experience to a revival of one’s masculinity. According to this perspective, a man needs to experience the wilderness to reaffirm his maleness. To become too civilized, which has connotations of becoming feminized, is a condition to avoid (Jussim & Lindquist-Cock, 1985). In the Canadian context, the signs of wilderness and the Mountie that often represent the nation are also representations of white, male dominance (Sojka, 2002).

Through the creation of art from cloth, I answer Domosh (1997) in her call for an examination of landscape from the perspective of social context in order to reveal the gendered construction of spaces that have become assimilated into culture. With the use of fabric, traditionally seen as a

female material and pursuit, repositioned as landscape art within the tradition of landscape painting, I raise the awareness of the constructed, gendered nature of landscape art and the development of the wilderness nation. In the history of art, men have traditionally painted the land *and* women as objects, to be viewed as passive scenery. The development in popular culture of wilderness scenery as mother-nature secures this bias. The results are damaging for a subjectivity and national identity informed by emergence, insubstantiality, equality, and justice. To label or shape an idea of the land as gendered limits what it could be, and I am also cognizant of the embedded assumptions about the land that are taken for granted.

I also see the danger of essentializing a feminist view of the land. Ecofeminism, as a political movement/belief system that tightly binds the female body, spirituality, and fertility to the earth implies that women have a stronger connection to nature and the land than do men (Nash, 1994). The problem then becomes not only a limited view of our relationship to the land, but of stereotyping and subordinating women to the lower realm of nature, devalued within Western European culture (Ibid).

Once, I went to Seattle to attend a conference in celebration of Ecofeminism. The weekend was a blur of ankle bracelets and song, of women celebrating women and the Earth. It was a self-affirming, energetic space, and was especially moving on the final evening when the gathering of delegates joined in a candle lighting ceremony. Was it for the Earth? For our vaginal solidarity? I can't recall. I had the peculiar feeling, however, even as I enjoyed the moment, that I did not really belong, that somehow this way of connecting to the land and to other women was suffocating me. Years later, as I watch my son gently touch ladybugs and make songs for raspberry bushes, I envision him as an adult in his world of men and women in the land. I am very thoughtful about how I use words regarding nature and the landscape. "Ladybugs are also boys", I offer.



The fiction of national identity has been constructed as a gendered practice within the settling of the wilderness. As Nadeau (2001, p. 199) states, “sexuality is a marginal space for confronting the culture of economics involved in debates on national identity and postcolonial subject formation”. Hetero-masculinity is a dominant cultural practice that is an important part of nation building (Domosh & Seager, 2001; Nadeau, 2001; Till, 2001). I don’t deny that the imbalance rests toward a masculine version of culture about the land, and that we need to be sensitive and close to the land, but to essentialize nature toward a feminist stance is equally unproductive. Instead, as Nash suggests, I look to use landscape, “as a shifting strategic source of identification without implying the adoption of a masculinist position or a fixed, natural, or inherent identity, or a restrictive notion of space” (1994, p. 239).

It is in the ways that meanings of terms such as nation, nature, and landscape cross boundaries and have been naturalized that the concealment of power relations connected to the land has occurred. By examining some of the meanings associated with these terms I might again view a focused scene of political distribution of power with regard to landscape art. Nation and nature derive from the root *nac*, and thus have a connected history (Olwig, 1993). There was an important shift from nation as defined as a people who are “naturally” born into a community, to nation defined by territory. Historically this occurred in Western European cultures with the

division of the land into blocks of private properties, usually according to a Euclidean, aerial, grid-shaped overview. By the time that North America was colonized, this division of land into private property was a standard practice (Ibid). The wilderness was set up as a binary opposite to the civilized, pastoral use of the land. Thus, in Canada, in various art forms, the wilderness took a significant position, alternating among interpretations of the pure, the sublime, and the frightful.

Many people who live in large cities appreciate landscape for the very fact that their lives are devoid of significant experiences in the outdoors. It makes landscape seem more precious to them (Cosgrove, 1984; Mitchell, 1994; Redfern, 2006). Consequently, there is a tendency for city dwellers to idealize nature. As Mitchell (1994, p. 20) observes, “landscape is an object of nostalgia in a postmodern and postcolonial era”. The popularity of idealized landscape images of wilderness in the forms of paintings, posters, and other decorations is related to this predisposition.

As one might expect, there is a rich history of cultural work dedicated to landscape in Canada, and contemporary and past landscape art can be used to help students critically understand the roles that landscape images play in the creation of mythical, national identity. The power that is connected to the label of national art is continually asserted and contested by various artistic groups. Landscape art, as a site of negotiation of power, is pertinent in this process. There is a possibility that both students and teachers can learn from singular encounters with landscape art how various groups appropriate national identity, and how it can be perceived against local and global identities.

The myth of the wilderness nation and the Group of Seven painters

I pick up the urgency with which Hjartarson frames the issue when he asks, “Less how the nation came to be equated with wilderness landscape than why the construction of [this] national identity continues to have such force?” (2005, p. 218). There are many facets to an answer to this question, all of which are relevant here. Art education has a complicit part to play in the perpetuation of wilderness nation as a reflection and production of popular culture, where the idea is firmly embedded in our collective psyche. In her commission on national identity done for the Canadian Ministry of Heritage, J. Rummens (2001) concluded that more research into the role of the state in the formation of identity, and more theoretical development of the formation and negotiation of identity was needed. Both areas are connected intimately to ways that culture is produced and consumed both inside and outside institutions such as art education.

The romanticized notion of identity connected to a physical place is broadly reflected in Western European culture through the social imaginaries surrounding cultural representations of nationalism. The public sphere of our mainstream culture resounds with this wilderness trope that naturalizes forms of racial and gender biases in culture surrounding the theme of virgin territory (Hjartarson, 2005). This is a pervasive and powerfully supported myth. This absolute, represented in landscape art as national identity, claims a truth of wilderness – the land untouched and pristine. In dismantling this myth we must be careful not to assert a new, absolute truth into the position of national identity. In the case of Canada, versions of multiculturalism, insisting on an absolute relativism where every position is legitimate, has become the new truth of who we are. This is just as ineffectual as the wilderness version of national identity because it infers a goal of a unified community that misses the complicated, mobile ways that we exist together.

While I am wary of the pitfall of relativism, of merely replacing one totalizing trope with another, this strong history of a monolithic relationship to the land that has dominated our education system warrants close scrutiny. This false unity of nationalism is a dangerous hegemony because it becomes very comfortable: the sense of belonging is seductive for the majority who fit into the landscape so framed. Within the context of art education, the notion of wilderness nation that is still present today becomes a subtle promotion through landscape art of the dominant, settler subject position. Evidence of this wilderness tradition can be seen in the canon of Canadian art, a foundational fixture that is perpetuated by the national gallery (see Whitelaw, 2007) and by much art education curricula. In particular, the paintings of the Group of

Seven, as Pat Beaton notes, are representative of this political and economic position framed by colonialism.

Pat: They [Canadians] love to believe that they live in this wilderness - and it is not [wilderness]. It is a mine, it is a lumberyard, it is everything. Everything has been affected, and the illusion of wilderness – its ridiculous. And nobody is willing to address that, and until they stop showing the Group of Seven paintings it is not going to be [addressed].

Interview #1

I view with amusement a video clip of an emotional debate between Globe and Mail newspaper columnist, Michael Valpy, and playwright, John Gray, which took place ten years ago on CBC television. “‘Fraudulent mythology!’ cries Valpy. ‘Let’s have Christmas cards with pictures of the Spanish Inquisition!’ quips Gray” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archives, retrieved: 2005). These two cultural commentators were standing on opposite sides of a familiar, worn fence, debating the worth of our Canadian love affair with the Group of Seven. I need to go back there, to this debate, because their comments still hold weight.

The Group of Seven registers as a ghost every time I pick up a brush and paint a tree. So many of my elementary and high school art experiences were structured around these painters. My initial reaction to these paintings was a dismayed shock at how messy they were but later, I desperately wanted to apply paint in that messy, coordinated style that was the hallmark of these men. Later still, I am again dismayed that I missed out on so many other wonderful, Canadian artists because, year after year, the Group reigned. Therefore, this debate is still relevant today for me. It is also relevant for other educators.

Recently, during a brainstorming session at an art education conference, the first response to a request for issues about art education that needed government attention was a request for quality reproductions of the Group of Seven at a reasonable cost. My heart sank. Was I in wilderness landscape denial?

I look around a kindergarten classroom. It is a wonderful environment of interesting stations, with a variety of images and colourful posters covering every wall: projects under way - I could stay all morning and not see everything. But the artist and art teacher in me searches for art images and the only ones I find are of the Group of Seven. My heart keeps sinking. Am I in wilderness landscape denial?

Robert: When I went to school I was never introduced to an artist - never knew the name of an artist -other than pictures on the wall that my parents had, which were very poor excuses for art... I took one course in art in high school. It was given by a

science teacher who didn't know a thing about art. I had no idea about art. I didn't even know the Group of Seven, to be completely honest with you, in high school... I did take an art course [at university] and I was embarrassed in that art course. I was embarrassed with the work that I was producing, because as I recall, the people around me had some knowledge, some influence. Maybe it was the Group of Seven they had and I didn't!

[Laughter]

Interview #1

The continued popularity of the Group of Seven landscape painters is a poignant example of the power structures that are enmeshed in landscape images. The creation of these visual, national icons in the form of landscape painting resulted in the development of a particular national identity in Canada that benefited settler groups of British colonial ancestry at the possible expense of other groups within the country. In the field of Canadian art and popular culture, the Group of Seven sustain a mythological notion of Canada-as-wilderness which correlates to the familiar theme of nationhood as landscape that is part of national identity (Beer, 1999; Bordessa, 1992; Hill, 1995; Mackey, 2002; Wright, 2004). Originally, the Group of Seven paintings reflected a desire for autonomy from British dominion. With time, they became an absolute truth as the myth of wilderness that continues to signify the hegemonic, colonial position.

To fully understand the significance of the marriage of landscape art with nationalism it is important to point out that the development of nationalism through the manipulation of landscape imagery was part of colonial expansionism in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, United States, and Canada (Ely, 2002; Mitchell, 1994). In the case of Canada, the promotion of the Canadian Pacific Railway through tourism in the late nineteenth century helped create the myth. Artists were commissioned to travel the country by rail and create images for marketing purposes (Hjartarson, 2005; Reid, 1979). The tradition of the tourist artist was a strong one and the role of these artists was important in the development of landscape images that came to represent Canada.

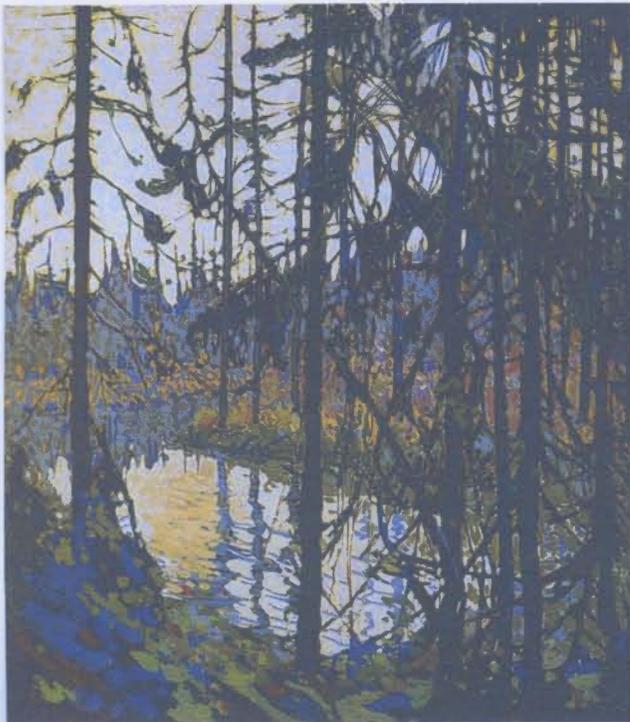
In addition, Canadians were attempting to extract themselves from a powerful European influence in the early half of the twentieth century, and were searching for images that would reflect a uniquely Canadian identity (Hill, 1995; Nasgaard, 1984; Osborne, 1988; Reid, 1979). In seeking an alternative to British domination, these painters and their associates sought a creative solution, and in doing so they invented a different, but equally overpowering hegemony. These landscape painters spent their lives worshipping the land with brush and greasy pigment. I know

why they did it but I am unable to adequately articulate the desire for mimesis. A painter's language is not easily translated without the translation becoming limited within the language of art history.

Robert: Sometimes I think it [landscape] is an escape – not an escape, it is an excuse to paint, you know? We could just as easily paint still life, I guess. But we don't. So there is a sense of movement and motion that does not occur in the figure when the figure poses for you. The sky is always moving.

Interview #1

As the Group's paintings circulated, they no longer signified the places visited but rather the powerful, idealized wilderness that became their interpretation of Canada. This coding propelled these paintings and their creators into iconic status. As Schama (1995, p. 61) points out, "landscapes are culture before they are nature ...[as] the metaphors [become] more real than their referents". In this case, upon viewing the landscape of northern Ontario, I smile in recognition of Wright's (2004) comment that the landscape looks just like a Thompson painting, rather than the reverse.



Tom Thomson, 1877 – 1917 Northern River, 1915. oil on canvas. 115.1 x 102.0 cm.

The producers of the nationalism myth in this case were the artists who, in the early twentieth century, promoted their work with savvy. The original group members were Frank Carmichael, J. E. H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, Fred Varley, and Frank Johnston. Tom Thomson, an influential associate of these men, died before the group was officially formed but he is often included with the group. They were seven urbanite men who

took trips into the areas north of Toronto to sketch and paint the scenery. They held a nationalistic goal of influencing Canadian opinions and values through their paintings, writings, and association with the National Gallery and Canadian collectors. Their works eventually attracted an audience for Canadian art that was larger than anything seen in our history, and as a result, there was greater recognition of Canadian art than had previously been experienced (Hill, 1995).

Specifically, the spreading popularity of the paintings was due in part to the patronage of the McMichaels, a couple who collected these paintings. They were enormously influential in promoting and establishing the works within the canon of Canadian art. They established the McMichael Gallery located near Kleinburg, Ontario, which is within reach of the major, urban, southern Ontario population. The gallery hosts 30,000 students annually and the web site boasts 10,000 hits weekly (Wright, 2004). This indicates that the promotion of the Group of Seven landscape painters is very much a force in Canadian nationalist culture today (Cormier, 2004). The McMichaels donated their large collection to the provincial government with the specific mandate that the works be aligned with the nationalist theme.

These nationalist ties were only loosened in 1998 when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the McMichaels were not within their rights to set the mandate for a public gallery (Wright, 2004). However, in a reversal of this ruling in November 2000, the Ontario government returned curatorial decisions to Robert McMichael so that the original mandate of only representing Canadian works by the Group of Seven and contemporaries would continue.¹¹ The comments of one member of provincial parliament, Ms. Brenda Elliott, evidences the way that the association of the Group of Seven painting with national identity is assumed at the leadership levels of government as well as popular culture. “It is the job of this Legislature to help restore the integrity and financial health of a unique art collection that reminds us all of what it means to be Canadian” (Legislature of Ontario, 2000). The legislation allowed the gallery to raise the needed funds from the auction of various works no longer deemed sufficiently “Canadian”. The Ontario Museum Association strongly opposed this interference with the government policy of arms-length arts funding (Cavalier, 2002).

Although there is an acknowledgement that the national influence of the Group of Seven was focused on the population of central Canada, for many years there was little indication of an awareness of the kind of nationalism that this implied: that of the white, British settler. This is partially due to the mandate of the national gallery that perpetuates this art as national icon within their education programs and these documents are often used as resources for educators

(Whitelaw, 2000). However, changes in the philosophy of the McMichael Gallery are evident in the recent show entitled, *The Other Landscape*, organized by the Edmonton Art gallery. Curator, Andrew Hunter (2003, p. 8), sums up the myth as he states,

I started...to look for a landscape that wasn't the wild untrammelled wilderness of the north country that looms over the Group of Seven and their contemporaries. This "other" landscape could best be summed up as land that had been worked, a landscape used for agriculture or industry or as a site of resource development. This, it seemed to me, was the true "heritage" landscape of contemporary Canada, the "true" north, not some imagined fantasy world of primeval forest and broad expanses of untouched soil, plant, and rock. This worked land is often there in many icons of pristine nature, sometimes in the background or beneath the surface, but often staring you in the face.

The demystification of the Group of Seven's nationalistic wilderness myth has been theorized by a number of academics, artists, and curators. Scholars have commented on how the depiction of an uninhabited land is a detriment to aboriginal peoples (Beer, 1999; Hill, 1995; Nasgaard, 1984; Wright, 2004). The Group of Seven painters unwittingly silenced a number of Native groups by ignoring their long history of living in the places depicted in the paintings. The painters intentionally excluded images of people as subject matter in an effort to diverge from earlier pastoral British and European interpretations of the colonies, which did include stereotypical versions of First Nations people. However, in the Group of Seven's romantic interpretation of the land as wilderness, no acknowledgement of aboriginal existence in a national representation only speaks for the settler point of view (Cormier, 2004; Hill, 1995; Mackey, 2002; McIntosh, 2006). Also, the mythologizing of the wilderness in the art denies the reality of northern development, such as logging, mining, and other activities that harm the environment.

In addition, the Group of Seven artists influenced the development of Canadian art for years after the group broke up because of their individual influence and their positions as teachers. They often did not acknowledge their influences, such as the Scandinavian landscape movement, Art Nouveau, and Impressionism. Thus a generation of artists who came after them remained relatively ignorant of world art trends (Nasgaard, 1984). The judgment of the paintings on their Canadian-ness, rather than on artistic qualities created a powerful, influential critique. This resulted in other contemporary artists, such as David Milne, to be under appreciated for his breakthroughs in abstraction; and it belied northern residents' difficult living conditions, for the Group of Seven often romanticized poor, rural, northern towns (Hill, 1995).



Franklin Carmichael, 1890 – 1945 Church and Houses at Bisset, 1931
oil on board 25.2 x 30.4 cm

Group of Seven paintings are often still presented in a favourable light, with a strong sense of nationalism that is often government supported. In the seventy-fifth anniversary year of the group's first exhibition, a large retrospective show was organized. The rock group, Rheostatics, was commissioned by the federal government to put the images to music, and a line of house paint was developed from the colours in the paintings (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archives, retrieved, 2005).

There is nothing wrong with displaying national pride in the art. But we must also present the art with an awareness of, and respect for difference by unraveling the myth and historically situating it, so that this Canada-as-wilderness concept is seen as just one of many representations of Canada. This occurred in a limited sense in the more critical view taken in the *Group of Seven Project*, a travelling exhibition and symposium on the eighty-fifth anniversary of the Group's first exhibition. Organizers and participants attempted to re-conceptualize the goals and impact of the paintings in light of the changing public sphere. More forays into critical understandings of these famous paintings are needed to continue to offer the Canadian public alternative representations of their country in art. Art teachers can be significant parties in this regard.

From sea to sea to sea: Road tripping around the edges



Journey with *Watchers* by P. von Tiesenhausen.

As I sit staring into the faded image of these seven Canadian men, these nationalistic painters recorded a life time ago, before so many changes in the world - in their time between two world wars, with their hopeful anticipation in the “new” land, I imagine them in my time. I imagine Harris, Lismer, McDonald, and the rest travelling the country in a pick-up truck rather than in the relative luxury of the train: looking for another wilderness encounter but finding a very different Canada.

Peter von Tiesenhausen carves life-sized figures of men out of spruce, and chars them in a large fire of performance. Then these sculptures travel, tied to the back of a pick-up truck and they leave a wake of wonder in people who see them. Peter takes five years to create the art and circumvent the physical borders of Canada. He begins his journey from his home in northern Alberta and drives his white 1984 Ford pick-up truck full of sculptures across the country to the far eastern shores of Newfoundland. They are there for a visit, to touch the Atlantic Ocean. A coastguard ship then takes the sculptures through the Northwest Passage and lands them in the Yukon, where Peter picks them up in the same truck and drives them back home. This curious journey of thirty-five thousand kilometers is Peter’s closest commitment in art to a consideration of a sense of home on the national level. This was not exactly a search for a sense of national place although the literal touching of the borders draws attention to the perimeters and limits of Canada as a physical place: as land. But Peter simply needed to take art on a journey.

He needed to create a story, and to tell the story frequently. It is a way of tracing the kind of intransitive community that is the touch of one, singular encounter with another. Through the carved figures, he and others meet and depart, and the knowledge that is left behind, and that is again moved on, revises nationalism myths: about the land, about road trips in the land, about borders at the end of the land. This kind of learning is excessive of organized structure. There is an unforeseen nature to it that is fun. I see similarities between Peter’s “teachable moments” for both artist and spectator on the journey, and the moments I experience in the pauses between my orchestrated lesson objectives in my teaching.



Video Still: *Watchers in truck* by P. von Tiesenhausen

Presently, the sculptures are silent and travel-worn, but still in the back of the truck, which is also travel-worn. They seem fragile now, after so many miles of travelling the vast terrain of Canada. It is in the serendipitous nature of this journey that Peter engages and the art becomes a performance. The art objects and the trip are inseparable and thus, connections and interactions with people all along the way are part of the creative joy for the artist.

Peter: They were still in the truck, as a matter of fact, they're still in the truck, and after telling... this story, I was so excited about it, I've been excited about it for years. Close to ten years I've been excited about this story.

Interview #1

He is reluctant to freeze the multiple aspects of this journey into a film, or a written story because it is impossible to convey the richness of the experiences of the trip represented in that way. Instead, Peter performs the journey in the retelling, and thus, the sculptures live each time in his performance. He has talked to school children, teachers, art audiences, and business people about the project, and it is an event of teaching and learning with each telling.

As I talk to him, looking at the figures, hidden in full view under the roof of the old barn, again they instigate conversation and exchange of stories and experiences. By themselves, as cast iron figures standing guard on Bay Street, the financial district of Toronto, or as original carvings standing retired in the isolated fields of northern Alberta, the objects are only shadows of what they were on the journey. In the telling and retelling of the story they come alive. The magic of

Peter telling his story through visual encounters engages the listener, “into a *conspiracy* with the storyteller-narrator and those characters, a political and value-based conversation about the relationship between current conditions and a more desirable state of affairs, between *what is* and *what should be*” (Barone, 2001, p. 180, italics in original).

Art education can be conducive to openings toward inquiries into subject positions through such stories. In making and discussing art, the personal values we tacitly and overtly hold are often presented.

Peter: The intention is to give - just the spirit! Give of my time. There is no profit margin.

It is - you just do this thing because you want it to be. How do you do it in such a way that it is [not] going to be depleted in the end?

Interview #3

For Peter, retaining this project as an oral performance is his strategy for keeping the work fresh and avoiding the depletion of the rich layers of meaning inherent in the work. Many educators have never fully understood the potential depth of power in the license that comes with the arts to expand possibilities, expose our value systems, and to connect on a singular level, or to *free the imagination* (Greene, 1995). The ways that we are both co-opted by cultural role models and rupture such models through the act of making and considering art are always in tension.

Whether our imaginations are inspired by such artistic visions and actions, or by our own creative endeavours, the imperative that we imagine how to work within difference is the ethical and political necessity of education that can circulate through art. Teachers as well as their students have much to learn from artists who allow their inquiries to thrive within an undetermined journey. The challenge tied to this circulation of art is to imagine the potential relationships among those in our classrooms and those in political struggles in places far beyond our classrooms. One factor in these many struggles toward greater equality and social justice is a concern about the land: its use and its health and its ownership. Robert Dmytruk comments,

This [research project] has made me think a bit about ownership, land, and closeness - the issues attached. My hill has turned into - in my mind - this island refuge, [The repeated element of a curve] could be refuge for me, it could be refuge for environment, for the last standing tree, so all those things are going through my mind now as I am planning for these canvases.

Interview #3

The enchantment of the wilderness signified in national identity is tied intimately to hegemonic control of all aspects of sharing the land: the ways that the land is used through the promotion of tourism and the activities of resource industries; and even at the level of the

language that is used to discuss such terms of ownership, such as in aboriginal “land claims”, instead of “land rights”. To “claim” does not hold as much force as a “right” to the land. The status quo of empty wilderness as beautiful and empty implies the interpretation of the land as resource, and this is seen as central to Canada’s economic health. Whitelaw (2007) traces the historical conflation of Canadian landscape painting of the early twentieth century with a desire by the business and intellectual elite for a prosperous, independent Canada fueled by the wealth of natural resources. The consequences of this connection of wilderness and wealth can be seen today in the firmly established wilderness myth in Canadian popular culture and identity.

In this study, the ways that these participating artist/educators discuss the intervention of people in the land is telling of these artists’ concerns about the ways we take for granted a notion of wilderness within and beyond the nation in this delicate negotiation between environmental concerns and industry. The participating artists focus on the ways that urban coyotes have learned to avoid extinction and are thriving, while sturgeon are becoming fewer; the ways that trees are felled faster than they can grow back; the ways that industry crowds into rural spaces. For these artists, these indicators are warnings of an imbalance in favour of industry at the expense of the environment. It is time that we learned to appreciate the slippery quality of the term, “wilderness”, and the political ramifications of visualizing the country in this way. This is particularly relevant in art education, where images of national art are usually limited to paintings of wilderness. This is indicative of broader difficulties in the ways that art is often taught in educational institutions.



Robert: But the soil - I knew there was soil there, the tree and the soil - they were kind of places of passion.

Interview #3

The grass grows green laughing and gritty spaces in soil: Touching teaching

The wind is howling on the other side of the studio door. It rattles and I consider the quiet of spaces underground. This leaves me to consider the nature of a border between very disparate elements: wind and soil. I am at the invisible edge where soil touches the relentless force of wind. I dig in.



Author's cotton fabric being buried.

Art education: Outrunning the ghosts



I was running on a Greek beach, running aimlessly around Italy, running from my country, bag in hand, the year Pinar and Grumet (1976) succeeded in wedging a political elbow into curriculum and thus, loosened it from its positivist, teacher-centered anchor. Thirty years later, with their reconstruction firmly interrupting the curricular field, opening it toward the acknowledgement of so many forms of *currere*¹², I finally have learned to slow down to a gait, carefully noticing the terrain under my feet. As I pass over various learning theories, and as my students move into their adult lives, I realize that it is only because I allow myself to stumble over art that I can keep up my pace. In the surprise of creating art that brings my and others' lives together, I can hold my cynicism and dismay about continued social injustices, at home and abroad, in a manageable and useful place. If I stop making art, I stop learning on a level equal to the point of existence. However, it feels at times that it is catching up to me, this ghost of Tyler¹³ who still echoes in the structure of lesson outlines and curricular guides. Must we, as art teachers, always try to outrun the ghosts?

In Canadian art education, the under-representation of critically informed, contemporary artists is one disturbing trend that continues to haunt me because it is with an understanding of these socially aware artistic practices that students are offered insights into the ways that art can surprise people into questioning their assumed values. This opens a possibility of social change. With a sophisticated understanding of the power of the image in current life, artists have absorbed various technological advances into their work, and have redefined the sites of artistic practice and reception. Video, site-found objects, text, and the material of the artist's body are but some of the foci of art practices that can be located in the twentieth century and continue to be referenced in current art. Artists and art collectives working toward greater social justice in

their chosen forms of presentation are plentiful and need to be included in the curriculum wherever possible.

The reasons for this paucity of contemporary, socially informed artists in art education curricula are many. I speculate (and more empirical study may support this comment) that many art teachers are ill equipped to decode contemporary art. They often have been schooled in modernist traditions that have also shaped the institution of art education. Consequently, art teachers' lessons often model formalist analyses by default and this omits discussions about art and social conditions at any level; local, national, or global. Line, colour, shape, and so on, become the center of instruction, yet contemporary art practices have evolved in socio-political, situated, and material ways that move art discourses toward very different understandings. In art education many teaching opportunities are lost because of this disconnect between formalist and critical frameworks. These are some Tylerian ghosts that hinder the currere of art education.

Art education scholars such as Chalmers (2002), Darts (2004), Duncum (2001), Emme (2001), Freedman (2000, 2003), Springgay (2004), Sullivan (2006) and Tavin (2003) have brought visual culture to the forefront of art education. Art educators are aware of the ways that ideologies circulate through the creation and viewing of imagery. But while many educational interpretations of visual culture have centered on critiquing images through forms of media literacy, the work of many contemporary artists has been less prominent.

Also, Sweeney (2006) takes issue with teaching visual culture in ways that ironically reinforce pedagogy that controls the student. He points out that private becomes public in the circulation of images in our culture. Issues of power and control are mixed with the capture and manipulation of images. Art educators need to be aware of the ways that they perpetuate systems of control within education and whether they offer students opportunities to engage with visual culture in creative, critical ways. By introducing to our students examples of important, living artists who engage visual culture with what Rogoff (2000, p. 33) calls "a curious eye", we can begin to question the infractions that occur within a visual world and voice our concerns through art. Rogoff notes, "Curiosity implies a certain unsettling, a notion of things outside the realm of the known, of things not yet quite understood or articulated, the pleasures of the forbidden or the hidden or the unthought, the optimism of finding out something one had not known or been able to conceive of before" (2000, p. 33). Here is the potential that many of my colleagues and I seek in our private artistic practices, and look to facilitate in our public ones.

I deduce, from my many years experience in art classrooms, as a teacher and a preservice teacher supervisor, that many artists who are politically 'curious' are being overlooked within the

public education system. I have seen many art students graduate with an ability to deconstruct advertising, but they are often unaware of methodological and material ways that artists engage critically through their practices. Of course, we, as teachers, must select the few artists that we have time to present to our students and accept the ethical consequences of our selections. Also, within classes, age appropriate materials, including the subjects chosen by artists need to be considered. Finally, we must realistically ask ourselves how much information we can expect our colleagues to know. The demands on teachers these days are great. Despite these very real limitations, however, a shift in how we teach art, especially art about the land, is possible so that students can be creative and socially informed. As Pollock (1985/2003, p. 209) states, one role of art education should be “to produce for its students a usable knowledge of the social and of culture’s complex relations to the structures of economic, social, and political power and to the production of meaning”.

Many art education curricular guides are structured on apolitical, formalist critiques, and are focused on the mastery of technique and promotion of self-expression. While there is certainly a valid place in art education for these goals, these programs miss the opportunities to teach students how artists are complicit in social and political milieus. The two areas could be tied together more often to create meaningful exchanges between the act of art-making as creative self-expression, and the socio-political communicative force within art. A brief look at the secondary school curricular guide for the province of Alberta, Canada, reveals an emphasis on traditional, canonical works and formalist methods of art appreciation. When change is included as an educational objective, it is described as involving the individual, the social/physical environment, and relationships among individuals (Government of Alberta, 1987). However, there are no clear understandings of the kinds of changes that are envisioned. Furthermore, the ways that the individual, context, and relationship are defined is important for these understandings. Embedded in the language of this curricular guide are neoliberal assumptions concerning the subject: the individual. In addition to suppositions concerning the nature of the individual and the nature of her relationship to community, assumptions indicate values that emphasize linear time in the form of educational, historical, and social change. Alternative notions regarding self and community that are offered by some postmodern positions are absent. Also, issues of social criticism are silently left to the discretion of the teacher, to be included or excluded from lessons.

Additionally, the existential realm of inquiry is important to young people who are forming their life philosophies. When ontological questions that interrogate our very existence are tackled

in art class, there is often a holistic element to learning that moves students to an awareness of the interconnectedness of all aspects of life (Simmons, 2006). This approach to education can be supported and enhanced in art education, where students are encouraged to find creative connections among activities in their worlds so that learning might evolve without the limiting assumptions about philosophical dualities (Kind, Irwin, Grauer, & de Cosson, 2005). The black and white approach to art, history, and life causes negative us/them thinking that is ultimately destructive for all.

In order to gain a sophisticated understanding of their visual worlds, I argue that students need the analytical skills to appreciate the cultural significance of contemporary artists engaging in critical political work; work that examines facets of power structures embedded within communities. Walker (2004) makes a similar appeal in her examination of artists who critically engage with the signage and other aspects of visibility in their cultures in order to foster social commentary and awareness. Students need to be exposed to the ways that visual and theoretical slippage makes ideological and formal borders porous among images. Part of the responsibility of art educators is to help students make connections between their creative efforts and those of contemporary artists, with an awareness of context with regard to globalization and visual culture. As Congdon (2006, p. 50) notes, “We must ask questions about who has the power to make new knowledge, represent new ways of seeing the world, and participate in the construction of new cultures and a rapidly changing world”. It is relevant that students understand how making art can become a venue for understanding their socio-political worlds - and those of others - at the local, national, and international levels, as well as self-expression on a personal level (Souness & Fairley, 2005).



Author's cloth being buried.

As I inquire into connections among education, geography, art, and cultural theory, ideas become usefully complicated for me. I dig into the dense earth as an act of art. I bury one length of cloth under the cultivated and nurtured front lawn of my northern, suburban home, thinking of the textures of philosophical thought, art, and teaching. I feel for gaps within landscape painting that takes it from a still pose toward movement: spaces between the viewer and art, and between the two-dimensional picture plane and the three dimensional representation of the image. The cloth takes up this space of landscape art literally: this representation of distance, and translates it into touch: in burying fabric, in tying it, in drowning it, all of us in this study have made comments on the nature of space inherent in art about the land: that the form of traditional representation, replete with foreground, middle ground, and background is inadequate as a way of telling who we are and where we are. I want to cut this space out of the picture. Within this theoretical scission I find the artistic, educational, and ontological relevance in the closing of traditional, Euclidean space and the opening of a poststructural understanding of self through ideas of threshold, limit, and shifting borders. The participants specifically select various places that, through the cloths, become referents for multiple aspects of these places.

I wonder about my cloth, not yet unearthed, but I am not focussed on the changes that I will find on it. I ignore the marks and bugs on this piece, giving them a tertiary glance. The events of burial and retrieval have become the impetus for me, rather than the cloth as object. I work

intransitively. I shift to the act rather than the object in this site-specific experiment; but that is not quite accurate. The object remains, unseen, so instead of a transitive to intransitive move, I layer a performer's claim onto the cloth as art object as an additive process. In doing so, I acknowledge the importance of both positions, object/objectless. Both positions are relevant for educational and artistic practice because I value the process *and* the product. However, it is very difficult to hold this threshold still and this idea of "both and none" mocks me as I attempt to internalize it and place it into my system of values, where Bakhtin maintains is the location of meaning in social relations (in Harvey, 1996, p. 270). The untouchable sociability of buried art that is all about touching the soil is a site from where I connect the subject as an emergent singularity (Nancy, 2000).

I stuff the folds of clean, white cotton into this narrow crevice. Art is created by cramming cloth into fractured earth. The lofty distance represented in a landscape painting has been reduced to dirt hollowed away, leaving no space but rather a touching of cloth and soil. I attempt with this cloth to take the distance of a view and the proximity of a hole in the ground and twist them together. This is most profound if we consider space as a necessary component of thinking of the subject: I attend to this lack of space where I imagine the subject as *becoming*. Through a shift from representational landscape painting to the cloth, the art is placed in the land and becomes part of it; buried in the land and mixed into the vista. Landscape art touching landscape. The cloth becomes the material threshold between the land and scape: an erasure of the view. This loss of a sight line creates other tangential lines. This reversal from artist representing the land in the form of landscape art, to the land randomly marking the cloths opens possibilities to touch the manner that landscape paintings are embedded in the political ways we use and view the land. Between the binary of the distant and proximal there is a relation to the ontological becoming of singularities: to my becoming. It is not that my eyes are focused on the distant horizon and so I miss what is underfoot: it is more complicated than either/or. I consider the nature of "between" as the site of meaning: the threshold.

As I touch and manipulate the cloths with my hands in close proximity, and with my eyes, erasing distance - not only the illusion of distance found in painting, but physical distance seems to disappear as well. If I follow Nancy's trajectory concerning the ways that we touch with our eyes, this phrase suggests a paradox in that it is impossible to do so - to touch across distance (in Derrida, 2005). This oddity in the language draws attention to the ways that my body is in relation. It is part of an unexpected flow of proximity within distance as I touch with my eyes, staring at a distant horizon, or staring into another's eyes. I seek to understand the existential

connection between the act of looking at another and meeting her eyes, and the act of looking at an artwork. I further complicate this theoretical trail by considering that I took this cloth out of sight by burying it, thus privileging literal touch, the land and cloth touching under the earth.

This interpretation of sight as a gaze that is simultaneously distant and proximal (I touch with my eyes) is the site of meaning in a shared relation with another. It emphasizes the threshold of this paradox within distance and proximity, in the act of sight as touch: brushing up against the haptic (Derrida, 2005). In considering this kind of looking as contact, when I think of the nature of being-with another, I question the kind of space that exists between us. What kind of learning and reflection of the self is possible? Derrida writes (2005, p. 2, italics in original),

If two gazes look into each other's eyes, can one then say that they are touching? Are they coming into contact – the one with the other? What is contact if it always *intervenes between x and x*? A hidden, sealed, concealed, signed, squeezed, compressed, and repressed interruption? Or the *continual* interruption of an interruption, the negating upheaval of the interval, the death of *between*?

I understand this curious phrase, “death of between” as the continual readjustment of sense as knowledge, as *becoming* within relation. Derrida's description of an “interruption of an interruption” has within it a shade of his *différance*, emphasizing the continued referral of signification within the chain of meanings that occurs as one sign continually interrupts another. Meaning is always partial, as it requires the continued referral to other signifiers, where a search for difference helps to determine meaning. In this case, contact, as an interruption of what exists between two gazes is disrupted by the very act of the gaze: of the contact. It is unending, this creation of meaning within contact or touch. For me, the added importance of Derrida's theoretical trajectory into the act of two people recognizing something significant in the acknowledgement of each other's gaze rests in the resulting categories of either “stroking” or “striking” (Derrida 2005, p. 2). Derrida is describing the resulting actions within the contact, and it parallels my focus on the threshold of difference within learning. When faced with difference, we react either with understanding and learning, or we react with fear and violence: a “stroking” or a “striking”.

The “death of between” is the non-space of interruption. Whether one theorizes the significance of this contact as a space or a void is significant for me. I prefer the metaphor of the *void* rather than a *between space* because it more creatively describes this phenomenon of contact with difference in the creation of the subject, where meaning is continually interrupted. Importantly, the acknowledgement of one's joint *and* separation with another that is the mainstay

of Nancy's understanding of the paradox of touch remains within the metaphor of the void: it is an absence of space in an instant of a gaze, to be interrupted an instant later. The undercurrent of time is the unnoticed assumption that always influences metaphors of the void, movement, and flow within the dynamic of difference and *différance*.

So where is the significance in all this looking if I take sight away? I cannot see the cloth under the ground. Although I am no longer able to touch the cloth, with hands or eyes, the cloth is important because it is now in the land. Here landscape art is literal touch. The cloth becomes a metaphor for a significant way to consider *becoming* in the land, inferring a strong connection between our bodies together and within the land that we inhabit. There remains a residue of Nancy's (2000) insistence that touch both separates and bonds. His connection of the viewing of art through the motif of touch, a contact that is simultaneously proximal and distant, or as James (2006, p. 224) calls this looking at art, a "force of sense, the tracing of a line which both presents and withdraws, brings into contact and separates" is another entry into considering the ways that being with another creates meaning in the world. In art it is usually assumed that the body and sense are valuable tools, but the development of sense as meaning of self in relation to another, this trajectory from the sense of sight as touch, toward sense as meaning in the world is a legacy of Nancy (1997, 2000). In the literal touch of cloth with earth, the material metaphor of the "death of between" is manifest. There is no sight involved at all. Here is contact in a literal sense, of cloth and soil: the void as contact, no space *between* to consider. They are not one, the cloth and soil, but they are touching. This leads me to consider the contact of one with the land. How is this "death of between" to be understood within places we recognize as significant in forming our selves?

Identity is bound to a sense of place as we come to embody specific places. This place-bound identity is felt. In other words, we call places "home" and are emotionally connected to them. Tuan (1977) reminds us that there are influential aesthetic and sensual components to the ways that we experience space and place. On an emotional level, powerful feelings of belonging can be understood as the psychological void between self and place, metaphorically eliminating distance.

My artistic awareness often involves experiential links with a physical and/or imagined environment. It is through the development of relationships within a tacit knowledge of place, (past, present and/or imagined), that I come to understand who I am as a grounded body in my environment. Present encounters and past memories also shape this constructed self. Ellsworth (2004) reminds me that the ways our past intersects with our present form the learning self.

Feelings about the particularities of my special places are tied intimately to my interpretations of self. I learn in a context – a place of the present and the past. Kincheloe and Pinar, (1991, p. 19, italics in original) comment on the importance of the connection of place to one’s individual history:

When one adds the insight provided by an examination of the Greek root of the word theory, *theoros* (to watch a spectacle), then cognizance of historical situatedness can be dialogically linked to the insight derived from concrete situatedness, that is, place. The value of individual experience is thus linked particularistically and historically.

As Sumara (2002, p. 79) points out, “A sense of place includes the remembered and lived memories and narratives that organize human experience”. Tuan (2004) grounds identity in ordinary objects and common experiences to a level that I seldom recognize.

This phenomenological theme can be seen in art that expresses the emotional sensibilities that the artist perceives from the characteristics of a specific place. This experiential mode of representation, either on site in a particular place, or in a studio with the memory of a place, has a strong history in both site-specific art and landscape art (Casey, 2005, 2001; Lippard, 1997; Tuan, 1977, 2004). Artists often express the qualities of a place emotionally, using various chosen media.

Within this perspective, however, there is a potential to romanticize land and subject. When the formation of identity is connected so intimately with the characteristics of a specific place, it logically follows that these qualities of a place must exist before the self develops (Kwon, 2002). Consequently, if art as an extension of the self is based only on such local qualities, it does not create new knowledge but rather is a reaction to features that are already in place (Ibid).

Instead, I find Kwon’s (2002) consideration of the subject more multi-faceted and thus better suited to my sense of being in the world: deeply connected to a physical place but also influenced by national and global spaces. Rather than a narrow quest for an original source of identity within a place, I shift within each context and relation. So while I value the influences that places have on my sense of self, this is only a part of my transformation as a learner, as an artist, and as a teacher. Additionally, relations with others and with other times and places affect my reactions to my present so my sense of embodiment emerges from such differences: from such voids. Art education, as an exploration of values and identities, could benefit from this approach to the emergent possibilities of these theories of touch in relationships with others and places.

Time and time again: Spaces for doing nothing and everything

Robert: I have learned to take risks a lot more.

Interview #1

Within these smells and textures of the earth, pungent, yet oddly cleansing as I touch the soil, I continue to loosen pedagogy from the grip of neoliberal presence of product. The shift in value from the end result of a lesson or project that manifests in the rubrics of learning outcomes and numerical scores that structure so many art curricula to the process of creative, aesthetic inquiry is an important goal for me as an art educator. However, there are currents throughout art education that attest to pervasive and insistent value that is placed on preplanned, partitioned time and product. This has echoes and waves of the Euclidean metaphor of space in the division and mapping of the school day that is similar to the mapping of the land: one-point perspective perspectives both – in time and in space. This is enshrined in traditional landscape art and in the organization of school time. Education could benefit from the lessons that these participating artists teach through their commentary and art.

Pat: You have to learn to be comfortable with wasting a massive amount of time – what would be considered as wasting time... There might not be anything created. You are not necessarily going to produce something at the end of the line... It is bigger than an object or a project... I think it is a way of perceiving. Maybe there is a shift and it is different... links and connections and patterns and actions... there is a ton of performance [art] going on out there all the time.

Interview #2

Teaching is so totally consuming in a public, orchestrated way that the lived time of the classroom sometimes feels like an unknown dimension. After moving from teaching to mothering, and to being a student, I take the time back, I slow things down, and I rethink what I would tell students now - what I will tell my children - when they ask about school and learning. I will begin by telling them about time, how our sense of it magically changes in response to our level of commitment and attention. I would tell them that to reach the level of dedication that can stop time, it sometimes takes a long time.

bell hooks (1995, pp. 635-637) voices this concern for the ways that we attempt to control time when she notes,

Though important, it is not overly reassuring that some of us have managed to fit everything into the schedule. Because of this we now know that making everything fit is no guarantee that we will mature as artists and thinkers. Some of us fear that all of this tightly controlled scheduling is also constricting and limiting our imaginations, shutting down our dreams and vision so that we enter a different psychic imprisonment...we remain bound by limitations on our imaginations.

I am reminded by hooks and Beaton that there is no guarantee that my students or I will become better learners because we have full, organized days of educational activity. It is too easy in our current plethora of information to squeeze greater amounts of it into the curriculum. As it is, art is only offered to students after core subjects such as math and language arts have been slotted into the day. Art is usually valued within the educational institution as an optional subject rather than an important, core subject.

The failure to fully recognize the value of creating and viewing art for the pleasure of exploring the imagination and for making connections between art and the social issues that are part of their emerging communities leaves students missing important understandings about their places in their worlds, and about their abilities to act in public situations. This reality is particularly troubling at the level of the young child, whose imagination is at its most formative, expansive, and vulnerable phase. Who doesn't imagine herself in the role of the protagonist? In the case of role-playing the artist's story, if socially critical artists are not introduced to children, they will never consider the possibility that art can be creative commentary about socially relevant concerns, let alone imagine their personal potential to be artists and/or art viewers who can change their worlds.

With budget constraints to consider in the reality of public institutions, time becomes one resource that is always counted. Educational institutions need to recognize the value of what Pat Beaton has called "be[ing] comfortable with wasting an enormous amount of time", and while this seems an extravagant indulgence in our contemporary worlds of speeded up commitments, it is actually a necessary part of being a thoughtful, responsible, and active citizen; to allow the space of time unnamed: to find free time.

Through the proximity of touched cloth buried underground as landscape art, I draw attention to the ways that space and time are often parceled out and managed in education, as in a business model. This managerial aspect organizes time as a commodity. The aesthetic process in which I write and create ruptures this time with meandering traces of memories, embedded within narrative, and taped onto notes of theory. Ideas are pressed into my hand and are gone again. If

this kind of creative motion is appreciated in education, a school can crack slightly, shifting an attitude. The cracks within school time occur because of such shifts in values - and this is invaluable.

Our agency as artists and teachers, acting through the creation of art and the contemplation of it with our students needs space and time. The busyness and the business of education that gets partitioned into segments of subject fields and punctuated by ringing bells organizes time so that there remains little space to... just ponder. This division of the school day has the danger of eroding our teacher role of social critic, and a lack of open time whittles away the accessibility of the institution as a space for social action (Giroux, 2005). Additionally, on a global scale, if the flow of knowledge remains within the paradigm and metaphor of business, we will lose our claim to knowledge, “as a desire and right to know; not entirely as a means of competitiveness and dominance, but as an extension of educational opportunities” (Willinsky, 2005, p. 111).

With the hazard, in these compressed times, of educational institutions remaining at the pedestrian level of reproducing knowledge instead of creating it, I look for ways that open, anonymous time for imaginative play could translate into critical art education. But there does not seem to be an easy translation here. I remain hopeful that a fuller understanding of the importance of this kind of meandering time will nudge into schedules from filched minutes of laughter in the halls; from another half-cup of coffee in the staff room; from a shared blanket on the grandstands.

In the global, knowledge-based economy, we, as students, teachers, and parents, need time for creative strategies, insightful, convincing conversations, and actions that can emerge in conditions where the imagination has time to play. Pinar (2004, p. 247) sees the urgency of our time spent considering social, democratic transformation as he comments, “our task as the new century begins is nothing less than the intellectual formation of a public sphere in education, a resuscitation of the progressive project, in which we understand that self-realization and democratization are inextricably intertwined.” There is a doppelganger of scale in the mirroring of the global circulation of knowledge with the local, personal flow of knowledge between and among people who share the special kind of intimacy that exists in the school, and often in shared artistic endeavours. On both scales, and between these spaces there are opportunities for action and creative leverage that can create the necessary cracks in institutional time.

I realize that identifying the good times when I am teaching is sometimes difficult, not because they are rare – quite the opposite – it is because these times are brimming over with activity, with people, with attending to details, and with juggling commitments. There is no time

for reflection-in-action, as Schön (1983) has described. Teachers, as well as students are in need of some empty time where they can amble through their thoughts.

Daydreamer comes to visit the cat.
It lives in the front window down the street.
You'd think he'd be conventional,
And live in a used bookstore,
But he seems to like hardware.

Daydreamer comes to visit the school.
Invisible until - there - the stare
Out the window,
And the glare,
From the front.
Cat stretch and settle.

In my experience, the daydreaming that leads to creative, imaginative forays is often amplified as a condition of wandering with a drawing tool. Never static, when I allow my drawing the timeless quality of motion and drift, I find an entry into connections and innovations that otherwise remain arrested, unresolved, and/or unnoticed. Drawing moves me toward ideas.

The grass erases a line: Artistic gesture as pedagogy



Location of author's buried cloth.

Now, in the early spring, the Boreal is brown everywhere: the colour of nature's sleep. By burying the cloth, I foresee that I will initiate a drawing, making an arc of soil and dead grass. It will be a brown, gestural line cracking the future uniformity of the lawn. I have anticipated the instigation of a drawing made by dead grass. I think of how the cloth under the ground will slowly become seen with the spring rainfall, as the grass all around the brown cut grows green, leaving it marked there, as a gesture drawing in grass. But that is not what happens. It all turns green and weeks later I have to move blades of grass and search carefully to find the thin scar that is the only evidence of my art. It is almost hidden, this thin seam. The grass covers and erases the art, laughing all the while. It seems to mock my endeavours. I return to the garage.

My arm is tired. I have been furious with charcoal this morning, gesture drawings of folded, wrinkled, and soiled cloths. In my reversal of distance in landscape painting to proximity in buried cloth, I create art about the land from inside it. The black densities of the cloths, shadowed in the angled light filtering into the garage are speedy traces of gestures as my arm moves around and back on rough paper. I move to a large piece that was once used to wrap some

forgotten furniture. Soon my hands are soiled and I think about my buried cloth. I go out and rest, sitting on the lawn. The cloth is somewhere under me, beneath the grass.

I consider the connection of gesture drawing and the body in learning and in philosophy: motion, mobility, and action create reflective links. They lead me to the political implications within this model of embodied learning that can rupture the traditional hierarchy within the teacher/student relationship, suggesting strategies that could open curriculum toward an increasingly shared endeavour. If teachers understand that they, in tandem with their students, are within a pedagogical threshold with regard to their teaching as relational creative process, they can understand from such an engagement that their teaching is a continual event of learning. By engaging with artistic forms, art teachers could understand the potential for their teaching in this way from such embodied, creative experiences. This leaves me to mull over what it really means to share and once again I am reminded of Nancy's (2000) paradoxical view of simultaneous separation and intimate connection; his multiplicity of singularities within sharing. I am at the invisible edge, this limit that separates and joins, a threshold drawn underground with cloth.

Gesture drawing is meant to capture the movement of the subject matter: in this case, fabric hidden under my lawn. The artist seeks to understand the energy of the subject matter rather than the form. Gesture drawing is best accomplished with a relaxed and mobile arm; with a kind of looking that is somewhere between a glance and a gaze. This form of drawing is also a visual record of the movements of the artist's body in a particular place and time. The artist captures the gestures of her subject matter by using her own bodily gestures. This results in a unique, intense relationship between subject and object: marks made on the paper are traces of the artist's movements, tracing the movement of the subject matter. Thus interpreted, gesture drawing is a useful metaphor for pedagogy because learning, like gesture drawing, is signified by the relationship between two: in the dynamic of teacher and student, or artist and subject matter, acknowledging and understanding from within difference. Pedagogy can be imagined as artistic gesture.

Like many scholars before me, I suggest that we think about pedagogy as theorized and performed from the premise that learning is an unpredictable, relational activity that avoids preset findings. As Ted Aoki listens and moves through metaphor from under the silver veil of jazz music to education, he teaches me to seek the wealth of improvisation in curriculum, thus honouring the power within unpredictability that is learning. He suggests, "In curriculum implementation teachers are asked to shift from being installers to being improvisers, sensitive to

the ongoing life and experiences of themselves and students in the situation.... ‘Curriculum improvisation’ so understood helps us move beyond the hold of instrumentalism of curriculum implementation” (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 370). The same spirit of improvisation at the core of jazz is also the mark of gesture drawing. Within my artistic courage, I am able to meander a riff as line, narrowly avoiding the chaos of the scribble, yet also teasing a shadow of it out onto the paper.

My best teaching moments have also been at this edge where chaos and order touch. Just as gesture drawing creates strong lines between subject and object, following Aoki, I recognize an important shift in conceptualizing learning as a multifarious, uneven, and ongoing process. It requires altering my understanding of the teacher and student relationship to consider it as a continually emerging occurrence. The political and cultural binary of teacher and learner that has been a dominant signifier in Western European education tends to fade in pedagogy as artistic gesture. I am interested in the potential learning for teachers and students that occurs when we move curriculum from a focus on predetermined assumptions and outcomes to the *currere* (see Pinar, 1995) of the imprecise, vulnerable, and uncertain nature of gesture drawing. Pat Beaton offers her experience with regard to this learning potential.

Pat: Perhaps I need to look at the inability to sustain uncertainty, how exhausting it is if fought against. How to function inside of uncertainty, how to roll with it and recognize the benefits and not feel that somehow something is wrong because there is uncertainty. When one feels uncertain then they are pushing their boundaries and that is interesting. It is a recognizable and nameable part of the process. This is interesting to think about – I really am hard on myself in this regard. Looks somewhat comic from the outside.

Personal correspondence.

Pedagogues warn us of the dangers of too much importance given in education to accountability and managerial approaches to learning that have enveloped today’s schooling, including subjects such as the fine arts (Irwin, 2003; McWilliam, 1996; Souness & Fairley, 2005). Pinar (2004, p. 5) reminds us, “Education is an opportunity offered, not a service rendered”. As a teacher, I can guide, suggest, and even inspire, but I cannot learn for my students. Thus, the student is also teacher. She needs to discover for herself how to relate to difference and how to learn within it. Again, Pinar tells us, “As curriculum theorists have long appreciated, the exchange and acquisition of information is not education. Being informed is not equivalent to erudition. Information must be tempered with intellectual judgment, critical thinking, ethics, and self-reflexivity” (Ibid, p. 8). The creation of art can be a realization of such

erudition as fragments of situated knowledge and deep, challenging concepts are imaginatively synthesized and internalized. It is not unlike a gesture drawn.

In order to better understand how we might think about pedagogy as vulnerable, emergent, and dynamic relationality, I look at the circulation of sense with reference to our learning bodies. Embodied knowing begins with the sensual. Physical conditions of our bodies do not just affect the quality of learning, but it is through the body that knowledge is experienced and understood (Springgay, 2004; Stinson, 2004; Sumara, 2003). Each of us relates to places, to each other, and to knowledge through the filter of a unique body.



Interview with Pat Beaton: Video still.

To highlight learning as embodied is meaningful on a number of registers. Firstly in the political realm, the reaffirmation of the sensual body is, in part, a reaction to a traditional conception of pedagogy as a binary and hierarchical structure whose enthusiasts appreciate rational processes of learning over other more material, concrete processes. This conventional approach to education, which has its roots in Cartesian ontology, has dominated Western European education for the last century (Morris & Beckett, 2004). Also, feminist scholarship has valued the site of the body for both political intervention and theoretical understandings of the world for many years. The tenet of feminism stating the “personal is political” is a declaration that the body is to be valued as a site of political, social, and epistemological scrutiny. There have been many scholars who have drawn attention to the body in this way. Elizabeth Grosz (1995) eschews a binary model when thinking about the social body that privileges the mind as masculine, over the rest of the body, seen as feminine. Grosz (1995, p. 84) takes the dissolution of this binary one step further:

It is not enough to reformulate the body in non-dualist and non-essentialist terms. It must also be reconceived in specifically sexed terms. Bodies are never simply human bodies or social bodies. The sex assigned to the body (and bodies are assigned a single sex, however

inappropriate this may be) makes a great deal of difference to the kind of social subject, and indeed the mode of corporeality assigned to the subject.

The subject position that is nailed into fixed binary modes such as male/female, or student/teacher is most harmful when it accosts those who wander close to, or over the edges and limits of such superficial securities. If the subject is not “positioned”, there exists in continual emergence the possibility to become: to become man, woman, student, teacher... just as cloth becomes art through metaphors of wood, wind, water and so on. Here embodied learning can flourish – in the loosening of the body from its perceived immobility as immanent subject.

There are cognitive, emotional, and kinesthetic changes that happen to us, alone and together, in the ongoing process of learning. Using a metaphor of the fold, Sumara (2003, p. 91), comments, “that popularly held dichotomies such as mind/body, self/other, individual/collective, and human/natural are replaced with the assertion that such phenomena are enfolded in and unfold from one another”. He extends the physical body to a metaphor of the body that includes the complex social and physical systems within the world, systems that shift and morph boundaries in dynamic ways (Ibid). To think of embodied learning is to think of learning in and of the world, sensually and beyond sensual limits: it is to think of encounters, events, and relations within time and space that evolve in multiple dimensions.

In order to learn in relation to each other and to the multiple layers of self and place, students need to acknowledge their personal levels of openness with regard to the myriad encounters with difference that will be part of their daily lives. This acceptance of the new that evolves from diversity is a form of embodied learning. If they can learn to navigate among systems, open to what unique connections among the varied layers of their worlds are possible, perhaps a greater comprehension of the ways that they are connected within global disparities will be part of their schooling (Davis & Sumara, 2006). If pedagogues learn to facilitate such lateral thinking, Johnson’s (2002, p. 106) sorry description of the progression of a child to adult within our present educational institutions might be avoided.

The squirming, gurgling, swinging, musical, boundlessly energetic bodies of the young are squeezed into Procrustean desks, long periods of stillness, and geometric time where they will be molded for the next sixteen or twenty or more years until they emerge as full-blown members of the eviscerated community we now have, drained of the imagination, vitality, ingenuity, and resilience needed to resolve the many horrible crises that face us as a species.

At all costs, I seek to avoid such an educational nightmare. Like everyone else, I relate to places, to another person, and to knowledge through my physical form. I am intimate with space:

in the volumes of my body, in the immediate surfaces of my skin, and in the distant spaces of my lines of sight and my imagination. I am also intimate with the voids, the non-spaces of thresholds of difference. This buried cloth is one such site, marking the shift from distance to proximity and the related shift from Cartesian, neoliberal subject to an emergent one.

As Sumara (2003, p. 91) notes:

From this perspective, learning is not so much about being able to represent “objects” of knowledge. Instead, learning is more directed toward abilities to perceive relationships, to interpret connections between different biological, social, political, cultural bodies, and to recognize usable insights as they are created.

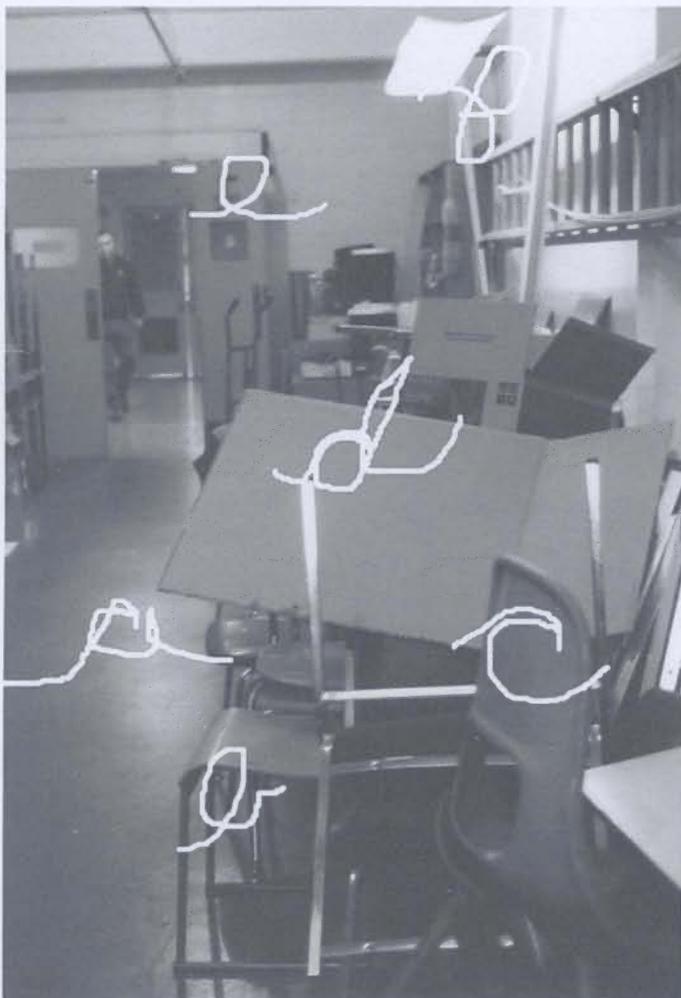
Emotions felt from experiences with difference are to be central, and not peripheral to the learning process. “It is, after all, at the critical places of pedagogy where bodies of the learner, the teacher, and knowledge come together” (Honeychurch, 1998, p. 31). Such educational considerations of the emotional, sensual body imply a need to investigate possible worldviews that support ways for pedagogy to be reconstituted as artistic gesture. Springgay (2004, p. 24) comments:

Instead of seeing from a distance I have often discovered resonance with perceptual signifiers that embody material senses such that seeing becomes touching, tasting, smelling and hearing. . . . Touch materializes as a concept whereby we come to experience and to know through the body as living experience and in proximity. Tactile epistemologies inform how we experience body knowledges as encounters between being(s)in-relation.

As I have indicated, proximity of touch is a physical reality for the buried cloth. Metaphorically, it shapes the ways that my institutional power as a teacher can be shared. There is a kind of intimacy and exposure associated within proximity over distance, and touch within sight that I seamlessly perform in making art. I understand that I can use my actions to internalize a Nancean community and subject as a form of personal agency (Nancy, 1991). I find metaphorical, corporeal references supportive of my quest to internalize difficult ontological theories into my practice as a/r/tographer. To attempt to restructure values and ideas about self and community is significant on a deeply felt level. As a teacher interested in the ways that artistic gesture as pedagogy can highlight the flexible, organic threshold of difference between teacher and student, I note the reference of Sumara and Davis (1998, p. 75) to an “unskinning” in terms of curriculum and identity. These scholars interpret the act of unskinning as “recasting self-images, renaming, unfixing...What is considered individual and what is considered communal cannot be caught within fixed immutable categories, but unfold through the continual fusing of perceptions,

understandings, and interpretations” (p. 78). They continue, “An unskinning/unskinned curriculum feels risky, dangerous, forbidden – for within it we are able to imitate nothing but who we are [pretending to be(coming)]” (Ibid, p. 89). Such metaphors that connect the body to education reinforce the fact that teaching and learning occur in relational, material events between singularities. They are non-repeatable, precious, embodied moments.

Education is, and should be so very personal: children with their teacher, and teacher with parents and other teachers. But what are these relationships really all about? How do I explain the surface and depth of a relationship that shifts in various and important degrees each day that we meet and say “good morning”?



If I tell you about power, you lose the laughter.

If I tell you about lesson planning, you lose the spontaneity.

If I tell you about one child, you lose the others.

If I tell you about all the children, you lose the child.

If I tell you about September, you lose June.

And I teach the daughters and sons of my students and still I cannot really tell you all.

As I contemplate my personal experience of witnessing and participating in relationships between and among people in various learning environments, it reinforces the unpredictable nature of relationships among people and knowledge that opens unforeseen possibilities. Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2000) remind me to be sensitive to the changes that I cannot perceive,

and that my actions are affecting change even when I am not aware of them. As educators, we obviously cannot anticipate what or how learning will develop in the dynamic of relationships, regardless of how prepared we are with our lesson planning. While this seems to be an obvious caveat, school systems are still mostly structured as if we can (Ellsworth, 2005; Pinar, 2004). Thus, very quickly we learn, as teachers, to dance a fine line between obsessive accountability and dynamic, relational teaching. For me, in art education, it sometimes has felt like dancing without toes. At other times, it has felt like dancing with wings. I end up as I began: somewhere in the middle.

Most teachers approach their profession primarily by valuing the relationships with students that develop and influence learning. However, very different conceptions of what the learning relationship involves create very different environments for learners. If teachers consider the threshold between learner and teacher as being the site of difference and learning, they shift their roles toward dynamic subject positions. It means that they relinquish some of their institutional power. Teachers may need to struggle to create spaces within their physical and psychological environments that allow students to own their learning. However, within the intimacy of our classrooms, pedagogy as artistic gesture can begin to be drawn, and teachers can lead by example in an exploration of a Nancean sense of sharing.

Irwin (2003, p. 72) suggests what pedagogy as artistic gesture might be like. She notes, "Rather than being preoccupied with explanations or rationales, educators would be closely attuned to their tacit knowledge, accepting that knowledge isn't entirely verbal and thereby includes knowledge derived through one's senses and intuition. Knowledge is created through these alternative forms of inquiry and as educators, it seems to me that sensitizing ourselves to these ways of knowing opens up deeper understanding toward our day-to-day negotiations with others and ourselves."

The value of this kind of aesthetic knowing owes a large part to the work of Greene (1995, 2000/2005). She urges teachers to continue to seek ways to move within aesthetic knowledge that links our teaching to ethical moral considerations. "Imagination is what makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called 'other' over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers' eyes and hear through their ears" (Greene, 1995, p. 3). She makes the important point that educational potential through acts of imagination are important because we can suspend our preconceived ideas of the teacher, student, and school so that we become open to the learning potential in events of difference. Significantly, becoming open to

difference is a necessary part of succeeding with social transformation. As hooks (2000, p. 98) suggests, art teachers can help students to see various shades of values, supporting their creative efforts to make sense of their personal places within their visual worlds.

[A]nd I think Sister G was wrong. I did not just learn to think about art on my own – there were always teachers who saw me looking, searching the visual for answers, and who guided my search. The mystery is only why I wanted to look while others around me closed their eyes – that I cannot yet explain.

While I agree with Bresler (2004) that the processes involved in making art are holistic and embodied, and thus, art education is a fertile place for the development of embodied learning, I would make the point that pedagogy as artistic gesture is possible and desirable in all learning relationships. It involves a sharing of institutional power: it involves an emotional and physical attunement to places that are valued: it involves an openness to difference as the core of learning. Gesture drawing is about the relationship: it is dynamic and emergent. So is learning.

Pat: One class got really charged. They made really incredible drawings and for the last part of the class I just let them draw whatever they wanted and they were just going from their imagination and just continued on – doing imaginative critters and all kinds of things. So that was good to see that happen. They often ask what they should draw and so we just made up these games. I explained to them that, “you are not making a drawing. The goal is not to make a beautiful finished drawing. The goal is to be moving your body and to be listening and making marks. We are not looking for product”. I think they relaxed a bit when they realized that they were not going to be judged at the end.

Interview # 2

As Beaton indicates, the fear of judgment is strong in art students because of the personal exposure that they risk with each creative act. I understand that sharing of institutional power begins with shared assessment. Just as significant, however, Pat’s comments indicate that there is a potential power in making art because of the ways that personal statements, values, and sense of self are exposed in the process and product. To share at this level opens a rich opportunity for reflection. This is key for recognizing one’s sense of personal agency. As Grumet (1995, p. 41) notes, “the ways of knowing the world that the arts present could make our kids smart. They could learn to dance what their bodies know, to draw the distinctions they perceive between ideas, to shape forms and shade colors to express relationships that they sense.”

Some might consider that curricular subjects are the definitive regulators of opportunities for artistic gestures of learning. However, becoming a slave or a master to a curriculum guide is the choice that any teacher of any subject can experience. Stinson (2004) has noted that within the field of art education there are two conflicting views. On the one hand, art can be prescriptive and representative of a mastery over the body. On the other hand, art can be a creative inquiry through bodily sensation. Irwin (2006) values the strategy of simply walking and being aware to open our sensibilities toward our aesthetic being. This kind of sensitivity is significant for teaching and learning in all subjects.

Politically, a shift to the threshold within binary thinking in secondary school culture is not easy. Divisions are the norm in this culture of subjects, where education is often perceived as upholding traditions of accountability and the transmission of knowledge. Moving to an embodied, relational threshold as the focal point of schooling has many ramifications for school structure. Pinar (1998, p. 27) envisions curriculum as a set of relations whereby, “learning is embedded with bodily knowledges, identities, and positions influencing relations of power within curriculum”. Pedagogy as artistic gesture is an effective way to think through to these goals. It requires a series of ruptures that would be felt in every aspect of school life.

Most importantly, the shift to pedagogy as artistic gesture begins with one teacher’s small but significant change in how she views her ability to find her own learning threshold, as teacher in a particular place. Daily she socially, physically, and imaginatively interacts with students in places. Inspired by the imagination, narratives, and material surroundings of every aspect of her environment, she can see her performance in the classroom as a constant emergence, contingent on context. She is simultaneously teacher and learner. How this potential translates into a learning relationship with her students is always the stimulating question.

...Absolute translation is an impossibility...translation is ever incomplete and partial, and further...ongoing translation is ever-ongoing transformation, generating newness in life’s movement. (Aoki, in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 430)

I wrap my children in a fresh, white cloth and roll them
on the ground. They are
laughing so hard they are
turning kind of blue.

STOPSTOPSTOP they scream,
AGAINAGAINAGAIN they yell.

Being tickled feels just like that: unable to stand it,
but unable to stop it either.

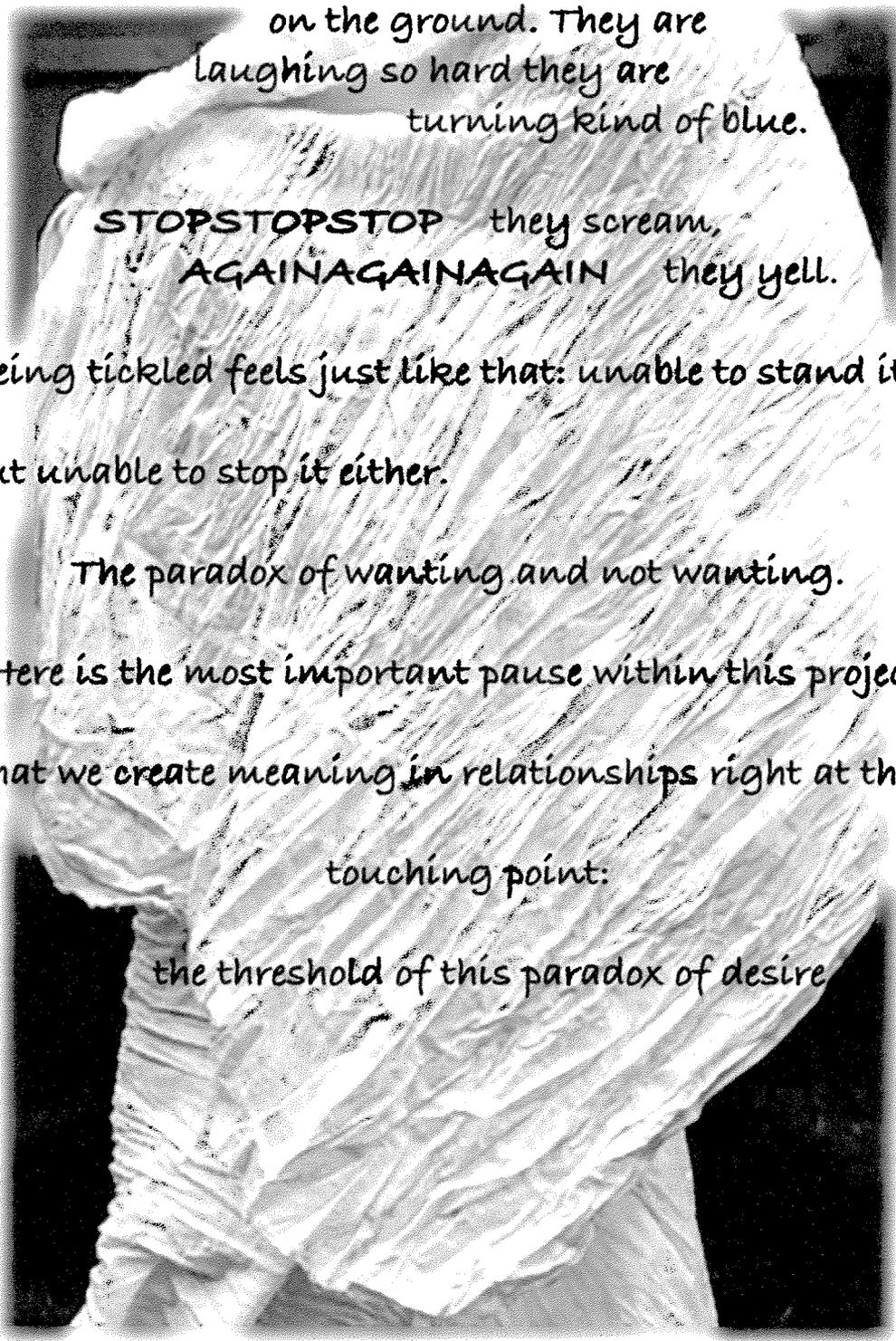
The paradox of wanting and not wanting.

Here is the most important pause within this project.

That we create meaning in relationships right at this

touching point:

the threshold of this paradox of desire



The grass hides the place where the landscape art is buried. With it goes the history of men in the land, of sights seen from a passing train, and of beautiful vistas selling country. I have buried all of this and have gotten dirty with soil. I step heavily onto the edge of my shovel, cutting again into the lawn, following a faint ghost of a line, the hidden seam that threatens to seal up my lost cloth forever. The ground splits easier than the first time I tried to carve into it, but I am breathing heavily by the time I crack the line open completely. I am ready now, to take the cloth out of the ground. It was the first one put into place, as a gesture to that location, but also as a physical representation of my uncertain process. The fact that I am pulling this mucky cloth free of the myriad small roots of grass that are trying to keep it hidden is testimony for me that I am learning. More than any information I can offer my students, if I can be generous with sharing this acknowledgment of uncertainty within artistic process, I am confident that my lesson will be a drawn gesture worth remembering.

Robert: Here, I felt that I was closer to this soil... I do enjoy working in the soil, the tiny bits of soil that I have, and I cherish that - I think we all cherish that.

Interview #1

Robert's comments about the value he holds toward the soil and his assumption that we all value it makes me hesitate. I think that he is articulating the fact that we are all part of the earth in a general way. It is not that I disagree with his claim, or with the implication that we are connected in some way to the soil, but I am wary of assuming universality when it comes to people's attitudes about the land. While I do believe that part of who we become has to do with the places that we have experienced, when I consider the different ways that we acknowledge places and spaces, and the ways that assumptions about such experiences become hegemonic attitudes within dominant public spheres, I am reminded that space and place are quite complicated and ultimately are tied to our underlying philosophical understandings of subjectivity. Art education as I have offered it, as gesture, suggests a reevaluation of substantial, neoliberal subjectivity. Through a consideration of fungus, where one cloth was placed and left to rot, I open a discussion about what it might mean to live "life's movement" in shared spaces (Aoki, in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 430). I consider the nature of sharing and of art-making within a different kind of subject and community.



...Once you realize that you're going to die, that every mark you make will be gone eventually... then you become free...you become fearless, because there's nothing to fear... you know what the end result is going to be. And once you've realized that, you're free to do anything you want!

Peter von Tiesenhausen, Interview #1

Stinky ontology and the agency of decay: Finitude as freedom

Fragile cloth is not only testimony to a certain vulnerability in creating this project, but is also the result of physical changes to the fabric that take me back in memory to a spring day in my new home in Alberta. When driving the back roads that crisscross farm country you pass through invisible, divisible striations of smells: of pungent manure, of heady canola, of gritty dust. Now you smell it, now you don't. There is a certain relief and anticipation in the absence of smell, in the pause between.

And the ocean smells like lilacs in late August – how is that.

F. Wright, 2004, p. 71.

Driving along such a road one spring day, my five year old daughter reacts to the smell of manure. The shocking fecundity takes me back to many places, none of which have touched the life of my child. She is delighted with the odour and I am surprised. I inhale and take her perspective and can only imagine from the strong connection between memory and smell, that this scent is invoking for her some fond remembrance. But nothing she articulates. She wouldn't volunteer information that is obvious to her at a physical, sensual level. It just is. Beside her, her little brother clamps his tiny hand over his face. His grimace and appropriate three-year old explicative reminds me that such reactions to smells are personal: never truly shared experiences.

I am carefully unfolding one of Pat Beaton's cloths. It really stinks. Pat describes it as a strong, vinegary smell, but it is much worse for me. I hold the corners, thumb and index finger, gently, gingerly pulling. It doesn't really remind me of anything for it is too overpowering to induce a memory: it demands my immediate and complete presence. I finally spread the piece out to dry in the sun, curious to see how much of the odour will dissipate. I know, however, that this cloth can never be left in a closed room. I even exile it from the garage. It is moldy and the strength of these various spores that have nestled into the cotton over six weeks have left a legacy of blue, red, yellow, pink, and brown marks in various shades. But it is the invisible smell that is overwhelming. This circulation of decay that I smell in the air around me is a visceral reminder of existential limits. I will draw this smell back onto the cloth, noting every olfactory detail, every pause, and every breath that I take. It all is worked back into the cloth as a landscape of that place. Sight opens up to scent as I draw and stitch. This action begins a tangent between decayed cloth and philosophical notions of finitude. The potential toward agency that rests within the limits of life, and a shift in understanding community, as theorized by Nancy, suggests an alternative subject from the neoliberal model.

invisible glue

space of the shared motherchild body

the birthing push

threshold

difference is born as I hold you

outside, and cry

you latch on

you mouth you

opening space

Imagine if you will, the various imperceptible, relentless processes of transformation within decay. Each slightly differentiating shade of colour implies so much that is beyond the limit of colour, on this invisible, molecular scale. Decay is insistent in the way that cells quietly break down and up until the moment that cloth rubs off onto my fingers as a grimy film, I am unaware. Suddenly the entire world of my acuity becomes strange and I am slightly on edge and uncomfortable in my body as I think of all of the (non)sensed action around and within me. There is no opening for me here on this scale: no proximity, no disclosure. I cannot comprehend all within, behind, and beyond what I am seeing. Within this sudden insight I consider my blindness. I am at my sensual limit but realizing there is so much more to know that is impossible for me to see, smell, hear, taste, or touch. It is impossible for me to reach across this strange distance that is within me.

Finitude, as a liberating sense of limitation, has threaded through complex, philosophical ruminations by various continental thinkers, including Hegel and Heidegger, followed in subsequent generations by Derrida, Deleuze, and Nancy. The historicity of the continental thread of philosophy that informs my work as an artistic assemblage includes a conceptualization of our existentialism that deals with limits. Ultimately, finitude means death, the physical ending of our being in this world in a literal and material sense. But finitude as this ultimate border, what Bauman (2006, p. 42) calls an absolute alterity as “the total absolute unknowability”, opens the question of what is beyond death, and here philosophy becomes immersed in a praxis that critiques social conditions and seeks transformations. As Nietzsche¹⁴ has observed, when we kill off our god(s), we are left with our immanent reliance on our selves in this world. No entity, no form, no god upon whom our destiny depends awaits us beyond death in this paradigm. There is no infinity in a transcendent truth. If there is such a truth, we cannot know about it, so finitude still limits and emancipates our existence (Critchley, 2001). In this way, finitude stretches the limits of immanence, where we realize that we create our worlds alone, together. Here rests our infinite freedom. “The responsibility of the philosopher... is the production of crisis, disturbing the slow accumulation of the deadening sediment of tradition in the name of a reactivating historical critique, whose horizon would be an emancipated life-world” (Ibid, p. 73). I tiptoe across the philosopher’s floor and sit in his chair, sewing and cutting my cloths.

In a Heideggerian sensibility, finitude is our ability to “access the whole of the origin” (Nancy, 2000, p. 15). But Nancy goes further, worrying this notion of the whole:

“finitude” signifies the infinite singularity of meaning, the infinite singularity of access to truth. Finitude *is* the origin; that is, it is an infinity of origins. “Origin” does not signify that

from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular. (Nancy, 2000, p. 15, italics in original)

Finitude, for Nancy, is a singular experience that each time is originary in the making of meaning through the concrete encounter with another. The numerous exposures of singular toward singular that are infinite in their multiplicity are available to us because of this notion of finitude as a concrete, material existence in the world. We are born and we die. This we already share. This is all we existentially share. The important point that Nancy makes is that it is not the fact that we all share the potential to die, but rather that between now and our deaths, we will all experience others and death in vastly different ways (Hutchens, 2005). Thus, it is this difference that we all share.

This notion of finitude, dissected from religion, is intricately tied to the political and here is where I find purchase. Nancy makes the connection between finitude and freedom as a form of agency that is part of existence. We hold potential for action because of our recognition of finitude: that all we have is each other. It is recognition, however, of existence *as such*, and not an intentionality that is commonly associated with the autonomous, neoliberal subject. I am startled to recognize shades of Nancy's thoughts on finitude out in the distance across the field when I visit Peter von Tiesenhausen on his farm.

Fence chameleon

In the distance against a backdrop of sky and trees, across a large, fallow field stands a white picket fence. The whimsy of such a dislocation of suburban ownership into a rural landscape perks my curiosity. This fence runs for a length along the tree line and then just stops. No gate. I walk all around it, circling and contemplating a fence that has no visible function - not the usual tasks of containment and exclusion. It divides nothing and as I turn around this caricature of a fence, this misplaced structure erases the utility of the border. I am at the place where there should be a boundary, an inside and outside demarcated by fence, but it has no usual function and by walking, circling this unfinished fence, it begins to serve differently. Within the esteemed values of efficiency and usefulness that permeate our society, this useless fence offers me the potential for a critique of this assumed necessity of keeping busy. In this rupture of utility, this fence has abdicated its role of keeping me out and instead I am offered a way in to a consideration of social values. I change directions and circle it again. Spatial thresholds give way to open line of flat field and sky, and I, as vertical, with the fence, remain.

I look at this conjunction of the vertical and the horizontal that is a basis of landscape art as efficient, mapped, absolute spaces. This segment of fence seems so self-contained to me, out in the dried grasses of last years' growth, facing the farmhouse. I contemplate the arrangement of farm and fence and I tramp around it once more, thinking of the ways that site becomes important.



Lifeline by P. von Tiesenhausen

This fence becomes interesting in its unusual placement. The context of field affects the meaning assigned to the art, as it is with site-specific art practices of all kinds. I complicate my interpretation further by layering it onto the artist's intentions. For Peter von Tiesenhausen, the fence is ongoing and evolving: picket by picket, year after year. It is about staying put, growing old, and anticipating limits. It is a visual life calendar of sorts, recording the passage of time.

Peter: Making that decision to stay here was one of the most profound shifts in my thinking and that was the making of... that picket fence. A lifeline, where you embark on a project where you know you're going to be doing it the rest of your life... thereby it brackets your existence... it's a beautiful, beautiful process for me. At this point anyway. I don't know - it changes the way I think about it [life] - changes over time too. At first it was just an idea. But with the pounding of the first post you became consciously aware that there was a bracketing occurring and there was a commitment. I thought, wouldn't it be neat to watch something deteriorate over time? There's a connection to the future and a connection to your past in the building of this one thing - and how your thoughts change and how you observe it and how you go about that little project that day - every day - one day per year. Each time your consciousness is different.

Interview #1



Lifeline by P. von Tiesenhausen (earlier version)

This is a marker for the passing of one's life, as a testimony to a sense of finitude: as a work that is perpetually unfinished and unending until death. I enjoy the fancy of this useless fence that thwarts the usual rules of efficiency, yet also embraces them in its documentary nature as an exact record of time passed in the space of an artist's thoughts of a life lived in one place. The

fence is a very unique and efficient method of recording time. The paradox of this fence that it is - and is not efficient, that its function slides from the limits of our expectations toward unexpected configurations is why I love this chameleon of landscape art.

This sense of the chameleon, the changeling, leads me to consider other changes, the ones that I don't always recognize because I am so immersed in them. Change within community is like this. I sit alone in the grass staring up at this fence against the empty sky. I think of the changes and shifts in my relationships with various communities, and the psychological borders that are the edges of such communities. Communities based upon the neoliberal subject exclude as well as include. Do I really want to belong if it means others cannot? I seek a way to change understanding of collectivity on local, national, and global scales so that it could be envisioned in a more inclusive manner. These limits of communities could take a lesson from this useless fence, as it pickets such divisions of inclusion and exclusion.

Crumbling the space between you and me as not we: Community

What is a community? It is not a macroorganism, or a big family... .The common, having-in-common or being-in-common, excludes interior unity, subsistence, and presence in and for itself. Being with, being together and even being “united” are precisely not a matter of being “one.” (Nancy, 2000, pp. 154-155)

If, as Sullivan (2006, p. 26) states, “the outcomes of research should have institutional currency and relevance within disciplines and domains located within communities”, then I must question what a community reflects; how a community is born within a singular exposure; how a community dies within an immanent subject¹⁵. I must question where my place in community as artist, teacher, and researcher remains.

Nancy’s (2000) idea of singular, which is defined through its difference from the plural, deviates from the hegemonic, Western European tradition of the individual within her community. He does not use the term, singular, as a synonym for identity nor individualism, which he finds too close to the neoliberal definition of the subject (James, 2006). For Nancy, the relationship that singular holds in opposition to plural is the important point: the being of the one with another, multiplied infinitely is the plural of community: not the wholeness or oneness of an entity called community within which we all could become subservient. This might seem like a slight, irrelevant change in definition but it has important implications for the ways that we relate to each other within our various groups. Immediately the value of being an individual part of a community becomes replaced with the importance of the active relationship of one with another. To claim to *enter* into a community stresses the substantial, rational subject who possesses the power to act toward the betterment of her society, making changes within the framework of progress. In this linearity whereby events or things happen in sequence and build upon each other, this version of community assumes all are engaged in an intended goal, be it economic, moral, educational, or otherwise (Popkewitz, 1999). This is the way we usually think of people in communities. Here the shadow of the Enlightenment is long.

However, for Nancy (2000), community is never a substantial entity: never a unified whole. Accordingly, community is not a product but an exposure, because finitude is the only thing we share. This communal finitude is existential sharing. It is in singular encounters, in the difference between one to another, that meaning is made and that knowledge is created. He points out a peculiar paradox embedded in the way that sharing functions. Sharing is seen simultaneously as dividing something among people, and also as an indivisible, communal act. I share something

with others, and I hold only a portion, but I am connected to the others because of this division (Nancy, 2000; James, 2006). The relevance of this paradox is in the way that it describes and shapes the relationship among potential members of a community. Thus, Nancy reframes community into another paradox where we are all singular, separate and partitioned, and plural at the same time (James, 2006). “There is never any identity that is not shared: that is, divided, mixed up, distinguished, entrenched, common, substitutable, insubstitutable, withdrawn, open” (Nancy, 2000. p 157).

Ultimately, the touch of the one toward the other creates the singular encounter. As Nancy notes of this complex mixture of being:

Nothing exists that is “pure”, that does not come into *contact* with the other, not because it has to border on something, as if this were a simple accidental condition, but because touch alone exposes the limits at which identities or ipseities can *distinguish themselves* [se demeler] from one another, with one another, between one another, from among one another. The *mêlée* is not accidental; it is originary. It is not contingent; it is necessary. It *is* not; it happens constantly. (Nancy, 2000, p. 156, italics in original)

In his contemplation of the ways that difference defines and shapes community, Nancy makes the distinction that the subject is not a linear, evolving entity reaching toward some perfect endpoint. Rather, he claims a kind of existential immediacy whereby,

What we have in common is what always distinguishes and differentiates us... This is not the absence of a figure, but a plan always being sketched out, a fiction always being invented, a *mêlée* of traits. And it is not that identity is always “on the way,” projected onto the horizon like a friendly star, like a value or a regulative idea. It never comes to be; it never identifies itself, even as an infinite projection, *because it is already there*, because it is the *mêlée*. (Nancy, 2000, p. 155, italics in original)

On one level, Nancy is attempting to describe the indescribable, because to define community or singularity is to hold it motionless, and his entire argument stems, not from any one point but from a trajectory already in motion. It is not to suggest that his is a linear path of inquiry but movement within encounters or touching(s) of difference - encounters with another. Here is Derrida’s influence on Nancy in the focus on *différance* in the slide of meaning from one signifier to another – the movement itself rather than any one sign (Derrida, 1974). Nancy sees value in the movement. I attempt to capture such significance of this thinking in my transitions of place, cloth, art, interview, and video as I work, moving from one cloth or thought to another.

This is the nature of my narrative, of touching thought already moving, marking it with/as artistic activity.

I read Nancy's words translated from French into English. Often I can recognize immediately when I am reading translations, but as I read these texts I feel insensitive to the usual nuances of translation. I am getting lost in the words and need to remind myself to think of the literary way the words must "be" in French. In another instance, Nancy (2007) suggests there are words that resist translation.¹⁶ I am beginning to wonder if it is not just the poetic power of words in relation that is lost to me. With this reading, I begin to doubt. I am doing much rereading here. I realize that this discourse is better understood without the words, or with expression from artistic forms. What does this singular limit, at the threshold, reveal to me about my relationships, as artist, researcher, and teacher, among others?



Detail of *Fungus* manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

The challenge rests in being open to possibilities that shake the very structures of who I think I am as an a/r/tographer. In education, teachers often privilege a practical approach to their enterprises over a meandering of ideas into extended, ontological questionings. It is difficult to trust in such an alternative way of thinking at such a deep level. In this case, how can I, as neoliberal offspring, commit to a community that is not identifiable and substantial? To

comprehend that there actually is no decision to commit because by nature of being born and being with others, I already am engaged. Existentially, community happens in the exposure to another, where differences touch. Sociability and community rests within such vulnerable exposures. These are tricky concepts to reconcile with daily classroom routines. Unlike philosophical ruminations that often remain at the level of analysis and critique, education encourages and necessitates involvement and action.

It is within this insubstantial, or “unworkable” community that Nancy’s (1997, 2000) notion of sense circulates and he envisions the significance of being. Sense, as a singularity, that is, indivisible and immediate, circulates in the world as the physicality of the world, and also as meaning in the world in its random, continual flux. In his theorizing of sense, Nancy avoids placing it in either of the two parts of the established dichotomy of transcendence and immanence.¹⁷ Sense moves through exposures of being, neither coming from inside nor from outside the self. Instead, it moves between, as the void of space in touch, giving relation meaning in the acknowledgement of difference, but without reducing encounters to one interpretation (Hutchens, 2005). Again, to create a discourse about sense and its singularity predetermines and establishes it, and this is antithetical to the way Nancy envisions it. Sense is contingent on each and every instance of a singular being (Ibid). As I work with my hands, in this a/r/tographical inquiry, seeking sensual and theoretical limits, the way that Nancy values a bodily reference as well as an entry into making meaning is a significant aspect of his work for me. I begin to notice that this translated text is offering me alternative, reflective ways to *be* as teacher and artist.

Pat Beaton’s encounters within community art take me into practical as well as philosophical means for considering an alternative subject position, as suggested by Nancy. It is a challenge, however, as I struggle with shifting my ingrained assumptions and values about artist and teacher in community - about community itself. By touching and thinking about the cloth, and by manipulating it into another form, I use it as a heuristic device for understanding such shifts. My inquiry returns, once again, to the fabric.

Community garden as performance art

Pat has searched carefully for ways to promote decay, mold, and earthen evidence of finitude in the cloth. For her, it is the privileging of decay in the debris that we toss away that is interesting. Here she reaffirms her values about being in the world in a very physical and immediate way. She folded the cloth very neatly into a one foot square that she then placed under her homemade composter in the shared plot of land that is her community garden in central Vancouver.



Compost heap with Pat Beaton's cloth buried underneath.

It is loud here. The cars roar by on side streets that surround this block of green. A black, longhaired cat slinks near to my feet, curious. After six weeks, Pat seeks some kind of visual sign in the smells of decay. As we unfold a few of the layers, bugs scurry away from our intrusion. A small woodlice and a tiny centipede escape from the folds as they hit the sunlight. We expose layer after layer, unfolding slowly and tentatively, both of us jolting back away from the cloth repeatedly as the smell of decay assails our noses. Pat searches for evidence of grid shapes, the quilter in her seeking familiar pattern.

This experience of cloth cleanly folded and then unfolded into smells of death as the material disintegrates and falls from our fingers back into the cut square of soil surprises me, although I

thought I had anticipated this occurrence. The cloth has the fragility of a dragonfly wing. Part of the cloth remains at the site and becomes the soil for the next season of growth. I am startled by the speed of disintegration and the strength of these fungi.

I think about the ideas of finitude, sharing, and community as I remember these rotting threads floating into the earth. This place of urban/rural threshold calls out as it slips in its scale. I look to the street; I look down to my feet. A hole for cloth, a dead and growing place surrounded by a living city: infinity within this singular, material encounter of cloth, artist, and land.

In touching, in all the touches of touching that do not touch each other – touches of colour, traced, melodic, harmonic, gestural, rhythmic, spatial, significative touches, and so on – the two sides of the one sense do not cease to come each toward the other, acceding without access, touching on the untouchable, intact, spacing of sense. (Nancy, 1997, p. 83)

The thing about an infinite limit is that I cannot ever actually reach it because it continually stretches away from me. Sometimes I think I have arrived, but later realize that I have not yet reached an end. Considering Nancy, I value reaching for an/other and never actually getting there. This is threshold, this is sharing in difference, and this is where the cloth settles. I think of the singular space between one and another and I imagine it layered onto these words I write, coloured and ephemeral like a new-age aura. But the space of meaning has no physical form and does not take up a traversable kind of distance. I reach out and keep reaching.

The importance that Nancy places on the limits and touches of the sensual in and as meaning on the body is why I read difficult French translations. It is ironic in a small way that the language ties my body into knots and the ideas squeezed out of these paragraphs refer me back to pre-linguistic bodily existence and sensing the world, but also propel me forward into a sense of meaningful event unfolding as I write: *transimmanence*, Nancy (2000) calls this kind of existential threshold *both/neither* transcendent *and/nor* immanent.



Pat Beaton's cloth from the compost on author's lawn.

I realize, later, in my front yard, looking at this crisp, dry cloth draped on the ground only inches from my cloth, still buried and hidden beneath the grass, that by unfolding Pat's cloth and placing it here, I am making intuitive connections between our chosen places. References to her shared community now overlay my private, green lawn. The significance of the public stretching over the private is certainly not lost on me: this layering of cloth marked by a communal space onto private property. After all, the birth of landscape art in Canada and other colonies was a visual legacy of British practices of supporting land ownership.

However, the cloth is also a marker as Pat intended, for ways that she values the acts and moments of a community that evolve from the shared places of gardening. A kind of community that Agamben (1993, p. 86) describes as an intolerable act: “What the state cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging.” Pat calls the garden the perfect example of successful community art.



Pat Beaton's cloth dug out of the compost heap.

Pat: As a creative place I still say the community gardens are THE community art project: the much overlooked community art project. They function without funding or outside support; they are constantly trying to be taken away; they are probably the most successful examples of community development, and [of] creating intersections where people can meet each other who wouldn't normally meet each other. But anyway, I like to bring this up when I go to meetings around community and art-making because they [the gardens] are doing many of the things that people are trying to do with art projects. They're just doing it... the creativity that goes into each garden plot down there. They've got this little place where they can build things and grow things - or not. Put a lawn chair in the middle and read a book, or let their kids run around in [it]. They can do whatever suites them to do. Whatever they want in their square for fifteen dollars a year... it completely gets transformed over a year and will completely get transformed again in the next year - its very active and its huge with cultural meaning because people are growing things that they

miss from their countries and there can be twenty different countries represented in the garden. People carefully growing plants that they miss: vegetables, medicinal plants that they can't get anymore, or they're very expensive here. One woman was picking the weeds out of one garden plot and planting them in her garden and she said, "Oh, these are hard to find here". And most of us didn't know that you could eat that particular plant... things like that.

Interview #1

I contemplate the nature of this kind of unnamed co-belonging and the event of mobile, flexible learning that can emerge from the threshold of difference. Pat witnesses many cultural exchanges from such conditions within community art projects. In schools, this kind of learning that is in excess of set curricula always keeps me satisfied, even thrilled, to be a teacher. Yet, oddly, this kind of unanticipated learning relationship among teachers and students that many have experienced is often hidden or unnoticed, and consequently absent from the category of being called "educationally valuable". This kind of learning event is frequently inherent in art that is restless, that presses openings into the social fabric, either as tears, burned holes, or cuts, inviting and at times forcing the viewer to poke her head right through to question what she considers valuable.



I consider what is valuable, within my neoliberal upbringing, nestled in my substantiated ego, as I wedge the thought of encountering *you*, the imagined other, between my past and my possibilities: the meaning that is created because of our differences. I learn from something generated in this difference. This is precious because it shifts me toward unanticipated ideas. Such a singular meeting ruptures the hoarded assumptions of my

subjectivity, lifting my notion of being into a singular space of the relevance of sharing with an/other. Differences define encounters, create knowledge, and move you, stranger - or friend speaking strangely, toward me: we become/remain emergent. I move toward the limit of the other but never become the other. "A singular body does not accumulate but becomes, generating and creating a new set of conditions. It is dynamic, multiple, and folded. The singular body is its own reference point, it cannot be reduced to norms, nor is it understood through binary

relationships. The singular creates” (Springgay, 2004, p. 91). The singular is far from my subjectivity and I can find artistic and educational purchase in this threshold. I tumble in between categories with my art far before other areas of my life. The creative work that I have pursued often remains without alliance, a misfit within the divisions decried and studied within the art historical world. At one time this caused me distress, never to have a comfortable fit. However, with confidence and comprehension that comes from years of living, as educator and artist, I prefer that my work never fit in. When it does, I am not reaching my potential in learning.

Pat: Who would want to fit into a category somebody else makes? The categories. You make the artwork - someone else makes the categories. Sometimes I try to shift, if I have been put into the wrong category, - fits into the database better or something, you know? I don't want my work to be in a particular category... that would be quickly outgrown... it's kind of limiting.

Interview #1

Pat urges me to examine and look closely at the idea of crossing boundaries and leaving categories behind: limits marked. My mind wanders to my experiences in the numerous classrooms of my student and teacher careers. The repeated encounters of schooling that are different each and every time between teacher and learner come back to me. I am shaking my head and smiling as I touch on how this all makes sense, but in an oblique way, seeping into my body slowly with each rearranged line written and drawn.



Cloth from *Fungus* manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

Community garden as performance art: I think about this and about the various substantial and emergent communities to which I belong, and to Nancy's theoretical dismantling of these belongings. I understand this kind of emergence unevenly. Am I really capable of imagining an alternative kind of togetherness? One that does not depend upon my being a substantial identity – instead, being as a threshold between singular and plural, always in a moving recognition toward another but never becoming the other: created each time meaning is made from acknowledging difference. Do I have the imagination to let my assumptions go, so ingrained in my consciousness that they are as natural as breathing? I seek to internalize this exposure of the threshold between the plurality of community and singularity. “One must neither return to oneself, nor come to oneself. You must not ‘become what you are’: you must become...the becoming, or that which you become” (Nancy interviewed by Hallward, 2003, p. 50). As I recognize the magnitude of this theoretical hurdle, the challenge facing education to do the same becomes daunting. Can the institution recognize itself as unsignifiable thresholds between teacher and student? Does the singular/plural notion of community even apply to an institution, or is education too entrenched in a neoliberal position? There are interruptions within the homogeneity of institutional functionality that open spaces where this kind of community based upon exposure to difference emerges, kind of like little social volcanoes, erupting and softening educational ground before crusting over once again. Not surprisingly, they are located in the personal spaces of art, narrative, and poetry, created, spoken, and written in the first person.

Against violent cleanliness: Artistic non-strategy as non-curriculum

Art is pedagogical for the simple reason that it produces truths and because “education” (save in its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them.

(Badiou, 2005, p. 9, quotations in original)

I seek to create art that can “pierce a hole” through the traditions of landscape art and the subject position that often accompanies it. The artist of modernism perpetuates the myth of the a priori subject as self-presence. She is separated from the very context that created her in the first place in the ways that the art is highlighted as an extension of her personal vision, secured and immobile in its meaning. The de-centering of the artist from the work, like the author from the writing, has occurred throughout the second half of the last century so that meaning within art is negotiated differently for individual spectators. Power has shifted from the artist to the viewer in varying degrees.¹⁸

Nonetheless, I recognize residue of the modernist position with my a/r/tographical inquiry in the form of this document. So while I focus with one eye on the knowledge that I am in a neoliberal, romantic position as a *producer* of art, I observe my folly with the other eye. Of course, my eyes are crossed but this does create a double vision of sorts. This doubling, this rupturing of my own hermeneutic, reflexive activity comes from within this very endeavour. In the manouevering of cloth and words, I critique my position as a producer of knowledge in the making of this a/r/tography.

However, by also acknowledging that my subjectivity rests in every exposure to another, I begin once more to work on these words and cloths with the spirit of random circulation, creating a kind of artistic flotsam. As an a/r/tographer, I take Davis’ (2001, p. 139, italics in original) “aim to amplify the irreparable *instability* and extreme *vulnerability* to which any writing [and I would include any creative endeavour] necessarily testifies.” In this echo of Nancy’s (1991) inoperable, unworkable community, I glimpse the reasons why I presume, tentatively, to instruct the institution of education with my very personal vignettes. Of course on one level, my narrative could be interpreted as a neoliberal exercise of presence, but alternatively and more importantly, it opens the collective of the institution toward a *becoming* through relationships. Davis (2001, p. 141) contends that as educators, we need to encourage more vital, unhindered, yet tentative stances where she advocates, “rhetoric of exposition” rather than

“assertion”. We need to make spaces where students can loosen their clutch on their identities and create projects within this place of deep inquiry.

It is a deepening of inquiry that I experience as I perform a number of activities involving the cloths, and each act becomes a singular, possible moment of theorizing angles and lines of alternative, communal connections. I attempt, in reworking these pieces of cotton, to create a/r/tography in this state of continual becoming. The cloth is the exposition of ruptured, interrupted attempts to touch limits. Nancy’s (2000) main concern with the neoliberal notion of community as a whole rests in the way it results in devastation, distress, and injustice. “Within unitary community [communauté une] there is nothing but death, and not the sort of death found in the cemetery, which is a place of spacing or distinctness, but the death found in the ashes of the crematorium or in the accumulation of charnel-houses” (Nancy, 2000, pp. 154-155).

In community as a goal-oriented *cleanliness* there exists the potential for violent destruction toward others and toward the land. The exposure of the singular to another is lost when the subject only functions within the accumulated identity of the group. I witness vicariously the violent acts related to notions of identity, ownership, and belonging within our local, national, and global communities: in the ways such acts isolate and destroy various people and things not meeting the criteria framed by “designer capitalism” (jagodinski, 2005). I keep to the edge in an urgency to continue: to struggle through thoughtful makings without really understanding the significance of what I create. Here, in my artistic non/strategy is the importance of a non/curricula: to undo the substantiality of test scores, outcomes, and objectives, and to focus on the moment of learning seen within a Nancean sharing. Here is precisely where I locate pedagogy: as the moving, open space of threshold; difference toward difference.

In considering the ways that community resists signification, I translate Nancy’s interpretation of the creation of meaning filtered through his notions of being into the field of art and art education. The pedagogical importance of rethinking our ontological status is paramount. To do so is to renegotiate the ways that we live with each other, and this entails recognizing our being in difference. In thinking about finitude, the subject, community, and the potential freedom within these reworked concepts, there remains for artists and educators the challenge of imagining ways to create openings for people to understand that the shared world is also a transformable world. Artist/educators have the opportunity to make art, and to teach about the “uncanny chaos of life” or what Nancy (1997) calls the “circulation of sense” where “space and time between subject and object [is] pried open” (jagodinski, 2005, p. 131).

I return home, shoes wet from the ground of Pat's garden plot, and look at my lawn that is holding some of my thoughts within the cramped folds of one of my cloths. The soil covers it directly, without compost, and I imagine the fabric in the cool darkness of another world, one of tiny, unseen creatures, of delicate PH balances, and of sticky clay. Nothing is truly solid, I remember, as I think of relationships, community, and the land under my feet. In schools, teachers and students are always embodied in relationships as learning unfolds. This is the reason that Nancy's materiality is useful for educators in the field. His conceptualization of relationship and the creation of knowledge are forceful at the physical level - at the artist's level, at the teacher's level, at the child's level. As educators with others, if we reconsider our foundational position of the neoliberal subject, we can open a possible alternative in which we can perceive community from a different, philosophical place. The ethical ramifications of doing so can be seen and heard in every space of difference we encounter.

Peter: You have your tryouts and your errors, your failures - at the end of it though, you've learned something. If you haven't, then you're not paying attention. And you need to understand the work of being alive.

Interview #1

...from red thread to toe tag....

F. Wright, 2004, p. 65.



Fungus landscape (detail)

photo credit: Monica Emme



Pat: Well, when you are having a conversation with a stream - tinkle, tinkle – [laughter] there is this sensitivity that comes into everything. You become very sensitized to the land and everyday you go there and it is slightly different [when] you are there for a long time. You come to know it in intimate detail. Different weather: light, dark, different colours of green when it is cloudy; what it looks like when a blue heron flies through all that green; what it sounds like when it has rained or hasn't rained.

Interview #2

Banter with a stream *and* etched by the rain: Flows and dams of difference



Cloth from *Water* manipulated by author Photo credit: Monica Emme

I rewind the video of Peter winding the wet cloth into a spiral and carrying it back to my car, across the bridge, in the cold wet of early spring. This gesture, taking the cloth and wrapping it into a ball is his play with the gaze of the camera; my researcher's gaze. His movements stem from instinctive gestures and are shaped by intention, as he communicates with me through the camera lense and through time. This action with his hands on cloth becomes the significant

moment of understanding the importance of doubling back to touch, in twisting and tightening the loose fabric into a solid ball.

In the studio, I follow Peter's gestures, making a wet ball of the cloth. It is not so pendantic as to represent the world, a globe: it is more about the tension that is in my body today, and the tension I remember in certain encounters with difference. I wrap it with beautiful, delicate silver wire, almost garretting the folds. This is a difficult cloth to create. It is a bit sad, so cramped and wrapped in on itself. Perhaps I twist this cloth tighter and tighter because I contemplate how injustices within the past can create tensions in the present among different cultures, all twisted together in the classroom. While social transformation rests in our singular abilities to be generous in our experiences with difference, I recognize that it is not always easy – to be generous to an/other.

Peter: The way I look at it - it is the spirit of generosity. You just throw everything out there as a possibility and something takes hold. And somehow by that - by every aspect of nature, we get this abundance of diversity. This incredible richness. The way I look at art - all the forms of art - they are gestures of generosity and so I think that is the direction that we need to go.

Interview #3



Video Still: Interview with P. von Tiesenhausen

Peter's ball of cloth is dried and crisp with caked dirt from under the bridge near his house. He had wedged the ball of cotton into the bank of a creek-bed, and now with the spring run-off, the water rises and drags the cotton from this precarious mooring. He balances on one foot, reaches his arm under the bridge, grabs the cloth and pulls it free from its frozen anchor. He built that bridge to cross to a property that represents for him the reason why he is in Alberta on his farm, rather than in some other country. His parents' friends once owned the property and now Peter owns it. At the urging of those friends, Peter's parents immigrated to Alberta years ago.



Video Still: Interview with P. von Tiesenhausen

The sunlight filters through a rain-spattered skylight, animating Peter's face as he shows me palaces, now national monuments, photographed and adorning a calendar. "Here," he points "was where my grandmother used to play." He comments, seeming slightly embarrassed yet proud. I see a huge lawn framing a pale yellow palace, whorled with white arabesques and sconces. I try to imagine it as a family home, so displaced as it rests in grandeur now. I cannot do so without cinematic references to period films.

For Peter, travelling back to Eastern Europe where ancestors were like royalty and where the mention of his name often creates a slightly awed recognition is perhaps surprising and discomfiting for him. He is proud of his heritage, but unsure of this response. Peter tells me a

story about a trunk, a symbol of Nazi pressures displacing his family line and his line displacing others. After seven hundred years they have a day to pack up. The others, the previous owners of his grandparents' new home were not so lucky: dishes left, clothes on hangers, evidence of imagined and real atrocities. The guilt of adapting to an impossible, frightening time carried to the grandchild: carried to a new place. A European Diaspora caused by the Second World War is told in a story of lost and remembered loyalties, reminding us of the urgency of the project of social justice in education: of learning what it means to understand our difficult positions within difference.

Crippled hospitality: A national un-belonging

Within our multicultural arena, I imagine a place where we do not welcome, accept, or even tolerate difference. To do so reinforces the social power differential in favour of established residents over newcomers. Instead, we should be naming and recognizing the ramifications of this differential in an attempt to shift the ways we think about belonging and sharing. In educational circles, students are taught to be hospitable toward new students. This is simply good manners. However there is also an unsavory aspect of this hospitality for newcomers: they are required to adapt and change to accommodate this welcoming culture. Within this tacit requirement lie relations that become performed in cultural practice with regard to difference. Clashes among cultures within nations often reveal deep misunderstandings. Hospitality presumes that power rests with the nation: with those who already belong. As teachers, parents, students, and citizens, we need to examine and critique the aftermath of the welcome.

As Derrida (in Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 15) notes about the translation of language for the foreigner that is within a nations' acts of hospitality, "that's the first act of violence. That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?" The paradox of hospitality defines a foreigner's right to it by national laws through recognition of her name and family history. She is perceived as different yet we identify and accept this as part of her foreign status. Yet this welcoming recognition of status limits hospitality, for it does not encompass those who have no family name and history: the absolute other. The difference between the foreigner, who claims the social status of the name, and the absolute other rests in an "absolute hospitality," an act of sharing without expectations, duty, or obligation (Ibid, p. 25). In another instance, Derrida (Ibid, p. 27-29, italics in original) states:

...this foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court. ... Does [hospitality] begin with the question addressed to the newcomer (which seems very human and sometimes loving, assuming that hospitality should be linked with love...). ... Or is hospitality rendered, is it given to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc.?

This absolute hospitality that we hopefully enact toward the nameless contradicts the right by law of hospitality for the foreigner who we can recognize. It is not opposed to the law of hospitality; this pact we create with foreigners, named and recognized, but it is different from it (Ibid). In this way, although welcoming still gestures to social hierarchy that filters into the lives of immigrants in all aspects of their lives, there is a move in Derrida's explanation of this contradiction between a legally claimed hospitality and an absolute hospitality closer to a Nancean (2000) sharing as exposure to the other, simultaneously separate and joined.

Nancy's comment on the perceived political necessities of a defined multicultural model that is more harmful than beneficial echoes Derrida's point of the negative side of hospitality.

In fact, there does exist – and I am not the first one to point it out – a eulogy for the *mélange* that resonates with a conventional sort of political correctness, that is, with the normative stiffening of the most well-founded demands. Such a eulogy wholeheartedly celebrates generalized multiculturalism, hybridization, exchange, sharing, and a sort of transcendental variegation. Although we know things are not so simple, we now feel that having such whirlwinds, mixtures, wanderings, and interferences are not enough, that is, as they are... there are those...who recite an interminable catechism of unity in diversity, complementarity, and well-tempered differences. This well-intentioned discourse, sometimes welcome in moral and political emergencies, remains a discourse of intentions and exhortations. It does not reach as far as the very things with which it deals. (2000, p.148, italics in original)

Alternatively, or perhaps concurrently, in the symbolism of such welcoming gestures, we could think again how we are connected to the other, and reconsider the subject: reconsider the differences between us: reconsider the claims of the neoliberal subject inherent in an institutionalized, but exclusionary, substantial hospitality that is bestowed within property ownership (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). Here is where we can question the reproduction of nationalism, and the borders associated with social imaginaries of belonging that group us into a substantial whole. Phelan and Rogoff (2001) suggest, "If nations, states, borders, and citizenships are not perceived as forms of belonging, or are not the naturalized relations of subjects to places, then they can be seen as active forms of unbelonging, or of being, 'without'...rather than fight the issues of rights, belonging, exclusion, and migration we might be able to envision a whole other set of relations of being somewhere" (pp. 35-36). To imagine another kind of "somewhere", the images of our past and present need to be recreated as we form new senses with regard to local, national, and global places. Brennan (1990) underscores the unfavorable nature of our visual culture of national signs in that, "they reflect a submerged

history while turning it into a contemporary, instantaneous shadow” (p. 67). With every nationalistic image, such as wilderness landscape paintings, the dominant identity is reflected, as is its absence, those deemed not to belong.

Learning other: Shadowed memory across water

After years of soaking up nationalistic signs, we proudly identify with the red maple leaf. We sew this ubiquitous symbol onto our clothing and bags, and tattoo it onto our skin. I do too, my body becoming Canadiana, even as I seek another kind of collectivity that favours an unsignifiable reliance on encounters of learning as one person at the threshold with another. The points of this maple leaf are prickly for those who do not fit into the hegemonic mould of a Dominion-dominated Canadian. I start to wonder about the tree itself, hierarchical and rigid. In some people's thoughts, the maple is a weed, dropping its foliage, keys of seedpods littering into crevices and onto paths and lanes.



In Japan some years ago, I cycled around the island of Tokushima, then my temporary home. I followed a popular tourist pilgrimage, spiritually serious in varying degrees, to visit eighty-eight Shinto and Buddhist temples that circle the island. It was dusk on my third day out when I finally put my bike down for an anticipated rest at one of these temples. High on a crag overlooking the ocean, the temple was nestled among branches and flora that were semi-tropical.

It was green in a sticky, noisy way that I only notice in hot climates. The deafening cicadas were out that year: the seventh year of their life cycle. There was no room for sky in this lush suffocation of growth.

A priest was working with a hand-held tool, shaving skinny, pale curls from an enormous log braced up by two homemade sawhorses. I was struck by the precariousness of those supports. The log was grand, with a girth much more than my arms could reach. It seemed so uncharacteristic of Japan, a wayward stem of Jack's bean stock, having settled on this mountain cliff after months of drifting on the surface of the sea, floating aimlessly in from the West. Like me.

While I was looking, the priest recognized my broach of the familiar red maple leaf. He beckoned me over with the urgent generosity of an old friend: something that, at that time, different faces in rural Japan often experienced: embarrassingly made Other by over-friendly strangers, or furtively made stranger by others' extended stares. The priest lovingly patted the log. He then pointed to pillars supporting the open roof of the temple and smiled. "Canadian trees", he announced, in the stately, distant and sonorous voice of a Japanese Speaker of the House. He considered me somehow responsible for producing this tree of royal stature: this tree that had been sliced and shipped across the Pacific, directly and not by chance. He was making declarations now, in heavily accented English. I leaned forward, a habit of translation that had crept into my body after years of living in expatriate status.

I was dismayed to finally understand that he had an old growth tree here on this green and hot mountaintop, lying defeated; its stories of environmentalists draping themselves desperately onto it with chains erased from its history in this new place. It now would have another life of incense, chanting, and tearful desires, whispered in the guise of worship. It would behold the confessions; the kneeling white ghosts of so many souls. It would keep the rain from all the committed, devout beginnings and endings, stoically bearing the heavy, grey tiles of roof.

Standing beside the priest, whose cheerful gesturing began to drift away from my body, I felt that uncanny sensation of time stopping. My hand touched the smooth, warm yet cool surface of the tree, wet from being scraped. There are so few giants like this one left in the British Columbian rainforests and I was suddenly desperately sad with loss: a conditioning of infinite days and images of wilderness; of living as a girl among trees and mosquitoes and endless summers of late light, long shadows, and carefree wandering. The limits of public, urban space became transparent in these places where there were no houses: the rural spaces of forest roads became my private paths. Dusty feet from camping trails, solitary voyages along silent, canoed

reflections, blueberry bushes heavy with sweet warmth: the endless images of landscape paintings lived, and my endless attempts to capture my own joy of living under such skies and branches.

Oh, Ca-na-da. I come by my own wilderness obsession honestly.

Thomashow (1996, pp. 9-10) has suggested that in order to greater understand one's ecological identity, one needs to explore childhood memories of special places, be aware of disturbed places, and consider wild places. He explains,

To explore memory you have to be a good archaeologist, knowing where and how to dig. ...The purpose of revisiting the special places of childhood is to gain awareness of the connections we make with the earth, awakening and holding those memories in our consciousness of the present...not to nostalgically pine for a lost, innocent childhood, but to recover the qualities of wonder, the open-mindedness regarding nature, the ability to look at what lies right in front of us.

In a flash I return to my hand, right in front of me, touching the flesh of wood, and the spark of memory is gone: time winding up once more. I glance down the long, smooth length of this giant log and settle into another place. What greater worth could there be for a cut up, cut down tree, than to create the revered space of a temple? To bear witness to the serious contemplation of the meaning of life, as the little tiger-striped snails climb up and entwine, in days and days of immobile lovemaking; wrapping around each other in their endless circle, as is the nature of snails.

I see the Canadian landscape and wilderness through the eyes of a Japanese priest and recognize the desire to own the exotic. By comparison, the trees within his Japanese experience are so very different in size, and this old growth tree is spectacular even within Canadian borders. His reaction raises my curiosity as to the perception of all this "wilderness" for new Canadians, many of whom have emigrated from relatively crowded countries. How do new Canadians relate to these images of empty land that are frequently referenced in Canadian culture? The experience of the immigrant is different for each person, yet the one commonality is that each person leaves the familiar and enters the unfamiliar, becoming different. What connections are to be made between the newcomer and her new country? I would hope to see a shift for those who were born here as much as for those who have recently come.

Alterity unaltered: Acknowledging difficulty

The flow of people into Canada, like the river, passes the rural vistas and dams in the urban centers. The wilderness often remains a seductive idea rarely interrogated. There is a tendency toward isolationism within this false security of infinite wilderness. This notion that, as a nation we are in solitude, is an idea that seems to fit well with the quiet density of such physical expanses of forests that are characteristic of the land. Yet, the reality of youth reflects a different perspective as students virtually traverse local, national, and global spheres. The journey of the art educator should trace artistic trails across rural, urban, and national borders as well, so that students can affirm, within their classrooms, that these borders are flexible: a notion that is evidenced and lived through their negotiations with cultural diversity every day.

These cultural negotiations within the multicultural character of the school are complicated, however, for difference and cultural diversity are replete with misapprehension. The alignments among individuals can never be assumed because of similarities such as race, gender, economic status, or religion. Individual value systems stemming from other factors may take precedent over such obvious connections. Furthermore, such alliances are continually in flux. As educators we must bring sensitivity to a group context, so that we do not make damaging assumptions because of perceived similarities (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Congdon, 2006).

The linkages that occur in various relationships do not rely on substantial, cultural identity. We need to avoid the approach toward our multicultural communities that inserts a superficial notion of hybridity into the mainstream curriculum and examine closely the ramifications of the hybrid. The hybrid has become the new norm and a kind of essentialism has tainted the expression. As Foster (1996, p. 212) notes, "if we celebrate hybridity and heterogeneity, we must remember that they are also privileged terms of advanced capitalism, that social multiculturalism coexists with economic multinationalism." Bhabha (1990) once insisted on hybridity as a postcolonial affirmation of power, but it has morphed to a strange commonality whereby we all are perceived as hybrid. In this homogeneity, ironically, that we are all from somewhere else, the power to create spaces within the nation is weakened for minority cultures. Nancy (2000, p. 149-152, italics in original) takes up the issue of hybridity in discussions of diversity and difference, and makes the point that:

Hybridization is not "some thing". And if the hybrid, which each one of us is in his and her own way, is someone, it is not by virtue of any essence of hybridization (a contradictory notion) but rather insofar as it provides a punctuation or a singular configuration, for the

essencelessness of hybridization.... Every culture is in itself “multicultural,” not only because there has always been a previous acculturation, and because there is no pure and simple origin [provenance], but at a deeper level, because the gesture of culture is itself a mixed gesture: it is to affront, confront, transform, divert, develop, recompose, combine, rechannel.... Cultures, or what are known as cultures, do not mix. They encounter each another, mingle, modify each other, and reconfigure each other. They cultivate one another; they irrigate or drain each other; they work over and plough through each other, or graft one onto the other.

This is an important difference from the notion of the substantial hybrid where fragments of cultures create a new totality or essentialism within the subject. This “gesture of culture” reminds me that culture is an active space, connected to the way that identity within a person and a nation is already becoming something else.

Chalmers (2002) has observed that the most multicultural public schools in the world are Canadian. Within the classroom, I strive, as a teacher, to meet the needs of all members of my student population. This entails understanding students’ cultural backgrounds and being sensitive to different perspectives. But despite my best efforts, it does not guarantee that I will be successful teaching within such diversity so that plurality is preserved: a plurality that is not erased by aiming for consensus. This aim is subtly reinforced in many curricular guides that are based on linear, progressive structures. When I have organized my lessons and time with students using these often narrowly conceived rubrics of objectives-based learning, this structure filters into a tendency to seek closure regarding different issues that sometimes circle around the classroom discussions: issues that are related to personal values. Often, closure with regard to values only evades the difficulty that diversity entails.

However, this hurdle of teaching and learning within diversity is, according to Biesta (2001), the important opportunity that makes education open to alternative concepts of what it means *to be* in learning environments. She theorizes a pedagogy that maintains the plurality within the active spaces of contestation, so that the multiplicity of our values can be acknowledged within a relatively safe environment. She comments:

It is a “fragile space” the engagement of people with others with whom they do not agree, where diverse values and intentions are at the very fundamental inter/action. In this way political life and education share a major aim...It is only when we take that which makes our being with others difficult seriously, that there is at least a possibility for this new beginning to appear, to come into presence. (Biesta, 2001, p. 39)



How truly open can my classroom of this time and place be?

In art education the continuing conversations with regard to multiculturalism and pluralism have a long history. Many scholars have warned that if art education remains at the level of the art object as a product in a multicultural smorgasbord, then students are not offered an opening whereby they can inquire about important social differences on the simultaneous and multiple levels of personal, local, national, and global spheres (Chalmers, 2002; Desai, 2002, 2005; Duncum, 2002). Stuhr (2003) notes the imaginative potential in art to create relationships in cognitive, emotional, and sensory domains. It is important that difference and disagreement are not reduced to a kind of compromise that belittles our alterity (Biesta, 2001). Like classrooms, within community art projects where stakeholders come from a variety of backgrounds, the artist is challenged in this regard.

Pat: It maybe the first art work that they've worked on, especially a public art work, or the first time they have collaborated on that level, so I had to be really careful not to step in and take over. There were some situations where I had to step in and say, "No, you're not doing that", with certain people because they really needed that. We had a pretty wide range of people there, and there was potential for huge conflict. We managed to get through it without a problem. They've invested a lot into the project when it gets to the point that they are negotiating that stuff and that's really valuable and its important. I mean that is what makes it interesting to me, if that can be successfully navigated... so I am interested in how it can unfold and it can work, and how you can get people who would normally be conflicting personalities ... how can that work?

Interview #1

Through art projects, telling stories about being in the land, being different in the land, and *becoming* in the land can do much to shake the myth of nationalism assumed by the dominant public sphere. This is especially important if such traditions promote one group at the expense of others. It is in the unfolding of the shared, creative processes in art projects that art students can become thoughtful about their values, and consequently, their identities. As metaphorical water, this kind of imaginative process and inquiry can seep into the ground of collective memory.

Living Placed and Placeless: Visual Poetry



Watchers burning in performance by P. von Tiesenhausen

Peter tells a family memory of frightened people following frightful orders and I feel myself unable to locate this man standing in front of me with that history. I am thinking, as I trace the intricate trails of his grandparents, parents, and him from place to place, that his desire to remain in one place, on this northern farm, has been bred into him. And yet much of his work is about movement and transience. The nomad in me responds with a tacit understanding. I know how his hands move over odd materials, inspiring him as he draws with burnt trees, alum, paper, and chainsaw. This sensitivity is hidden by talk. But in his other language, in art, he communicates with delicate, tiny people silhouetted onto isolated railway tracks, etched by the rain. In the middle of a misty field, he leaves a residue of figures to be picked up by the wheels of a passing train and taken to - anywhere. He leaves me thinking about traces; of places passed by.

Auge (1996) has named places such as train stations, shopping malls, highways, and airports as non-places that are a symptom of global, accelerated living. For Auge, these kinds of places represent an alienation from a sense of belonging to a place and thus, do not represent lived cultures. I do not have the same interpretation of these non-places for they also represent the curiosity of travel: the exciting moment of the voyage, of touching down and then flying off

once more. This is my privileged position and I am fully cognizant that for most people in the world, to travel beyond their homes is a much shorter and smaller distance, and if they move at all, it is often not for recreation. The dispossessed are forced to move on beyond what they know and what they call home because of the dangers of war, famine, and other terrors. This is a world apart from my decadent placelessness. In the circulation of this common knowledge, however, I witness little concrete action taken within global capitalism to correct this imbalance. Like my colleagues, I remain sagging heavily on the side of the West. But the convoluted places where western guilt can be put to good use include aesthetic methods that jolt us from complacency long enough to make small moves toward awareness and action within classrooms and within art projects in various places.



Video still: Interview with P. von Tiesenhausen

In the hands of Peter there develops a kind of permanence within impermanence in the way that the art never stops moving although it leaves lasting physical traces of gestures drawn. These figures are roaming and rooted simultaneously as the dust of the figures moves on, attached to the passing train wheels, while the rain etches what is left of these tiny, ghost figures permanently into the metal of the rails in a silent, chemical reaction of raindrops, iron, salt, lime, and alum powder. It is situated, yet it also slowly disseminates with each tiny, hitchhiking grain.

It transforms on the microscopic scale of atoms and on the grand scale of kilometers in a mixture of physical and chemical transition. I am fascinated with the scope of these potential changes that structure this art piece in permanent transience within such variety of dimension. Transformation cannot be perceived, in the ways that the changes are excessively small and excessively big: on an atomic level *and* on a global scale. Either way, I can only imagine the movements and transformations from what are residual indicators: ghosts of rust and tracks that meet at my horizon.

Peter: I think when I realized that I couldn't make films, I also realized that I couldn't write and have it be just straight language.

Interview #1.



Video still: Painting on track by P. von Tiesenhausen

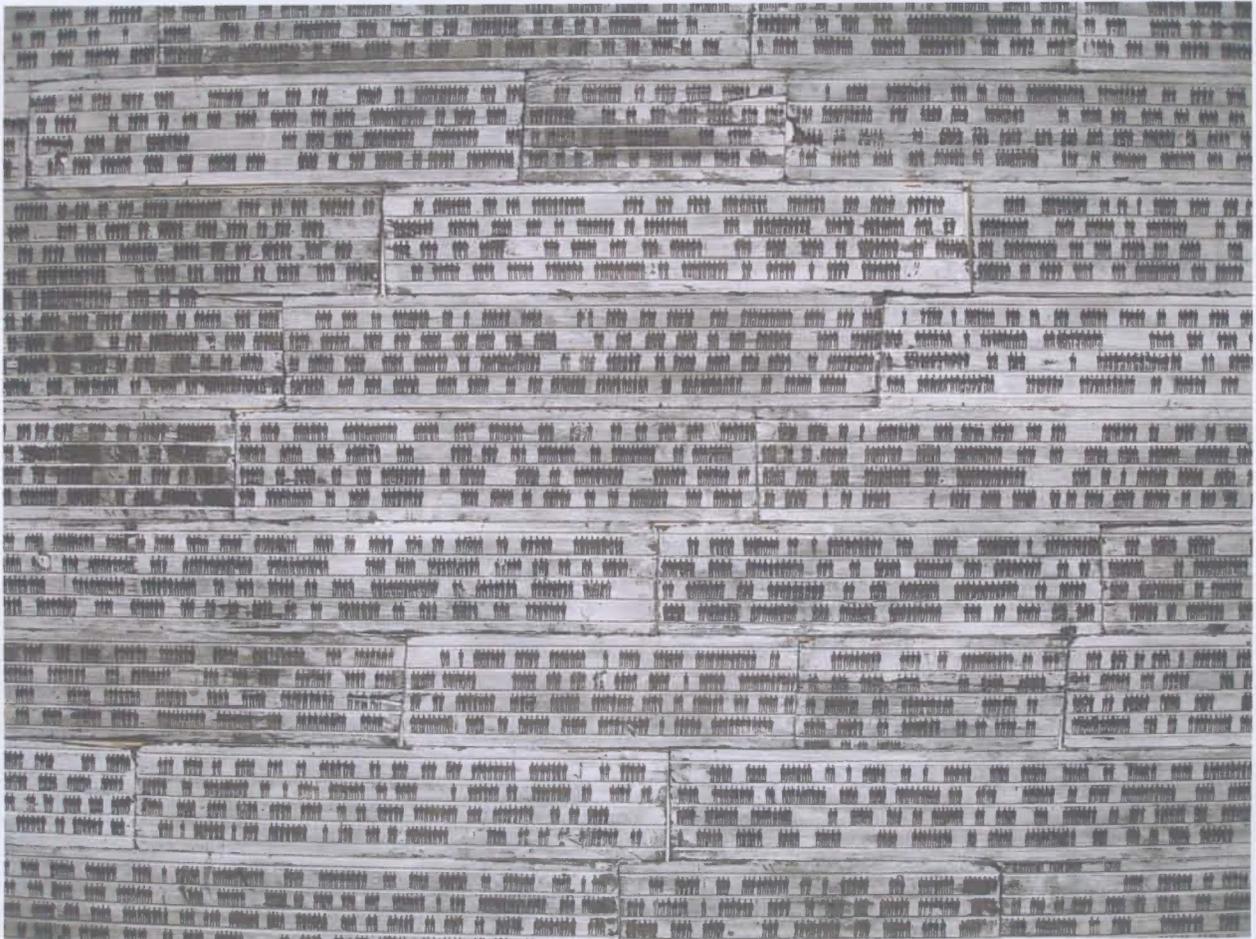
Peter describes this kind of drawing as his unique form of writing. I would venture to call it poetry of a very visual kind. This poetry, like much poetry, ruptures systems and assumptions: permanent ruptures sent out travelling as grains of dusty powder that may or may not be read. Perhaps these curious markings will be noticed; perhaps they won't. His artistic gesture is one of potentiality. It is the wheels of the train that grind the dust drawings but because this poetry is

already powered and waiting to be picked up, it is not destroyed by the wheels but is engaged and taken on board.

Peter: I'm doing this writing, on the railroad track, writing and riding... You write right on the rail. I am using salt, alum, and lime, which are all purifying things - or not purifying but sterilizing elements. What I'm doing is writing on the tracks. I've built a bicycle that you can use to ride on the tracks and so I go out there and I write my text... Right on the tracks. What happens... if a wheel rolls over that [writing], it picks up [the powder] on the shiny top. So it gets picked up by the wheels of the train, and it goes out to Churchill, and out to Vancouver, and to... Punta Arenas, Chile. Potentially. I doubt there's a train that goes to Chile, but if there was ... so it's a way of definition. Again, a connection to those places... they are discussions. They are easily recognizable forms and they are belief systems. Over days they rust because of the salt and they embed themselves in the track as pitted images.

Interview #2

This curious notion that the dust of Peter's visual poetry, as a belief system, moves on to all and every place/non-place, carried on the wheels of a train, has captured my imagination. We usually ride the rails in comfortable seats, staring out the windows at the landscape, isolated in movement, never thinking of the clackity-clack motion of the wheels touching each place of track below. Now I cannot forget them. Here is a metaphor for the way that both positions are concurrently evident in global circulations of visual culture. The significance of this art project rests in its position as threshold between the nomadic and the sedentary. It is a threshold that reaffirms the ways that connections among people in the world are often serendipitous, and often sparked by unintended encounters with images, simultaneously in the place we call home and in the non-places that move people, art, and ideas into other sites. These are potential sites of imaginative difference. The art teacher has the obligation to offer them to students as places of learning. Peter's art, like many lives, is replete with these nomadic and stationary gestures.



There and Gone: Text by P. von Tiesenhausen

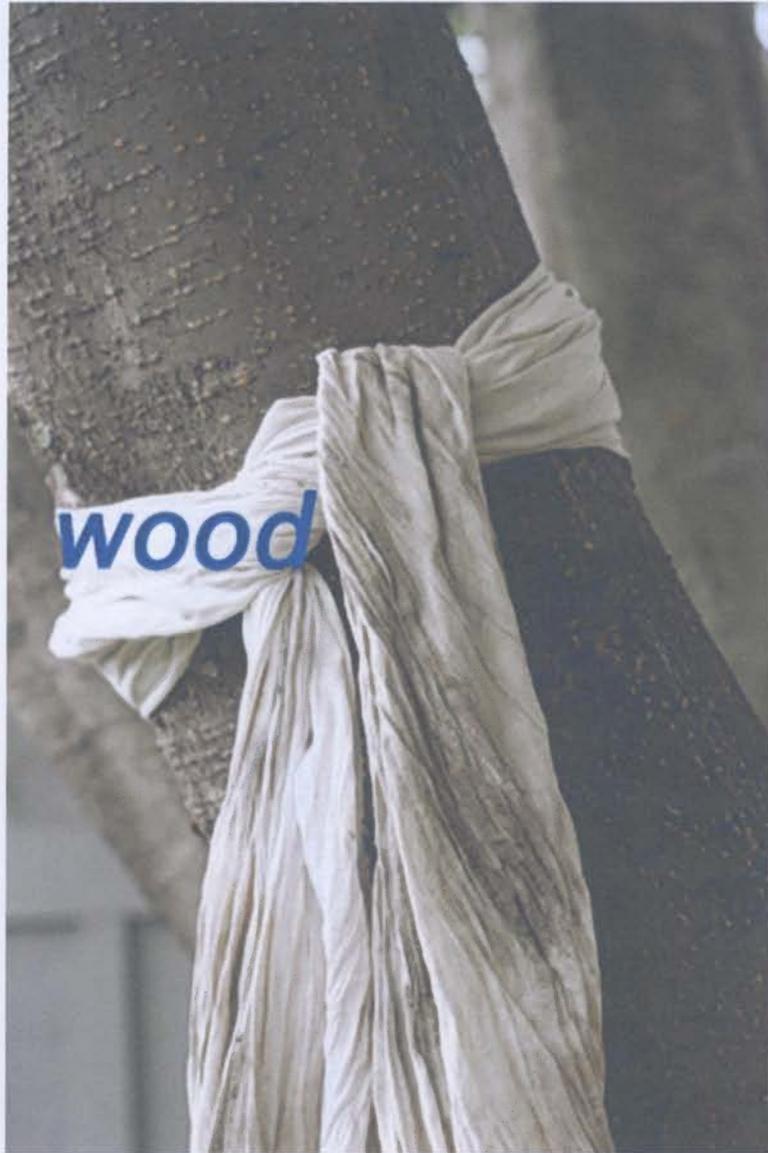
In connection to site-specific art practices, Kwon (2002, p.164) notes:

It seems historically inevitable that we will leave behind the nostalgic notion of a site and identity as essentially bound to the physical actualities of a place. Such a notion, if not ideologically suspect, is at least out of sync with the prevalent description of contemporary life as a network of flows... Indeed, the deterritorialization of the site has produced liberating effects, displacing the strictures of place-bound identities with the fluidity of a migratory model, introducing possibilities for the production of multiple identities, allegiances, and meanings, based not on normative conformities but on the nonrational convergences forged by chance encounters and circumstances.

Like Peter's poetry, residues of places are etched into my memory, informing my notion of a/r/tographer as I make art from these pieces of cloth. For Kwon, too, the influence of place does not disappear. She questions whether this desire to cling to a place is really "a means of survival" in a global, increasingly fearful world: or whether this transitory nature is a "compensatory fantasy in response to an accelerated, fragmented life within global capitalism" (p. 165).

Westerners exist firmly planted and also perpetually uprooted in/from places. Kwon reframes the duality of the singular and multiple place of the evolving subject with regard to art and artistic site, where the phenomenological, physical place that informs who we have become is carried with us through memory as we envision a nomadic sense of place in current culture.

As art circulates as sense, I recognize that there are too many moving parts in this cultural landscape to fix artistic and/or cultural identity, so that the artist role(s) shifts in concert with context. As an educator and artist, I acknowledge this as a condition of remaining in the middle: as threshold. The participating artists declare their personal versions of this role that, in turn, assemble within me. I consider the participants' and my significant places and spaces with respect to my emergent being, and I reflect on tacitly held values that are shaped by shared public spaces. I inquire about the political and ontological nature of space and its relation to important places through the manipulation of two cloths associated with wood: one of Robert's and one of mine.



Wood guarding my back: cloth escaping into the trees.
I tie my thoughts into knots within cotton.
The shiver of winter,
And spend my days untying them, warming my fingers, and opening spaces.
Knots of knowledge like silent and crisp flashes.
Fleeting and infinite moments that puncture my senses.
Sense opens my being to thought.
The cloths touch me and I touch in excess.

Climbing up trees full of art and being through the landscape strangely: Dynamic threshold

My daughter is telling tales.

About how a neighbourhood friend used Mommy's tree art to climb up the tree. "He got it dirty", she announced, not to get him in trouble, but by way of explanation, to fend off my anticipated displeasure.

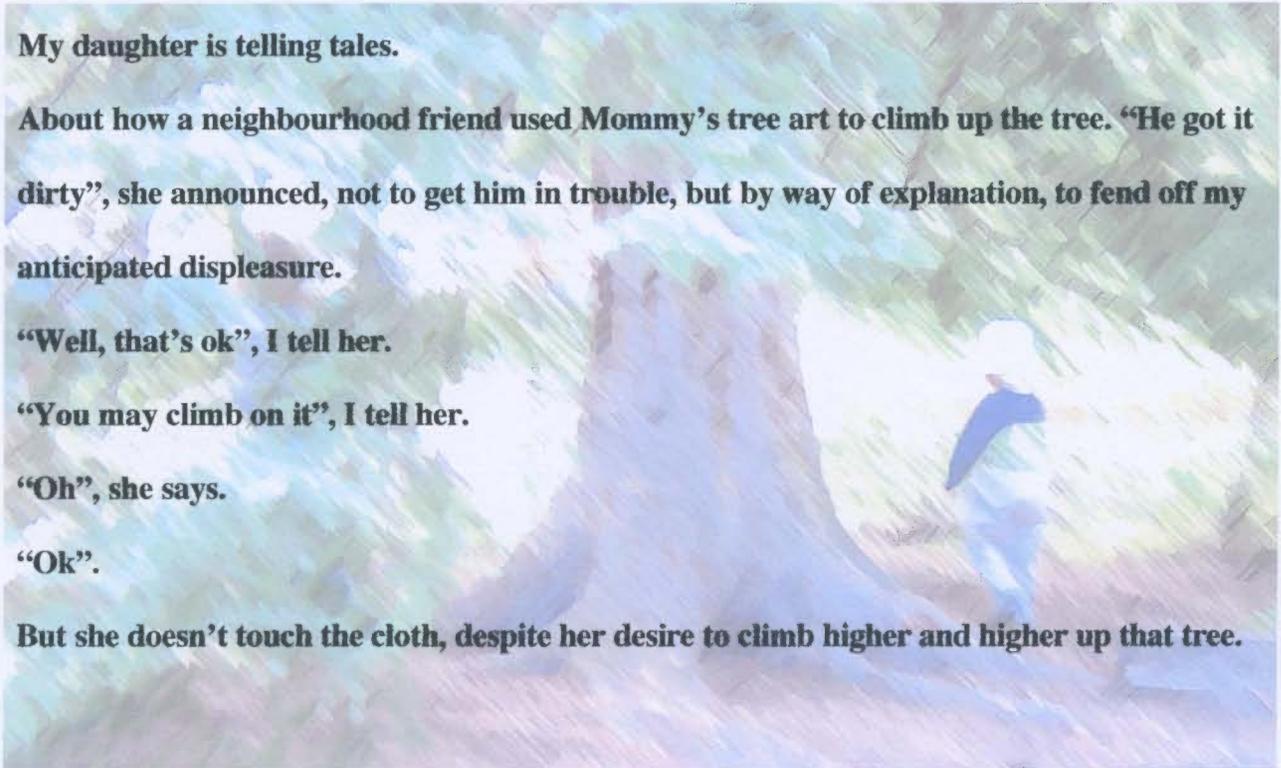
"Well, that's ok", I tell her.

"You may climb on it", I tell her.

"Oh", she says.

"Ok".

But she doesn't touch the cloth, despite her desire to climb higher and higher up that tree.



The societal norm of preciousness that children assign to art, that it is not to be touched, is part of the first thickening grey layer of self-discipline, learning to adapt to adult worlds bereft of touch, investing entire lives in the distance of sight. The ways that touching is allowed in the making of the art and then never again must seem random and confusing. This is especially so when art leaves the two dimensions of paper and enters into textures of sculpture where forms invite touch.

It troubles me. That she won't climb. I thought I had protected my daughter from these rules of viewing that we place on art. Within my ambitions, things go another way and I remember that my intentions as artist (or mother, or teacher) can only be offered as a gesture of my subjectivity. How my expressions are received is not in my control. I sink into my personal, artistic place and relax into the work. Here I find strength. As Pat Beaton tells it, "You just keep doing the work" (interview #1).

I think through thresholds from the elusiveness of wind, to the cloying resilience of mucky soil, to the decaying softness of fungus, to the constant movement of water, and finally, to the sturdiness of wood. I flatten and mold the two lengths of cotton to the wooden surface of this

studio table and by doing so, I can see the marks made by the trees more clearly. I can smell the crumbled, fragile cloth of fungus that sits behind me, near the door. It is softly raining today. Drops are knocking on my roof, insisting that I go away and leave this for a while. But I can't seem to go. The flatness of cloth has eliminated the distance usually perceived in landscape painting. Like my buried cloth outside under the lawn, there is a proximity here that suggests a lack of space, the element that not only structures art, but also aligns with various notions of the subject. I continually slide from book to journal to cloth and back again, a slow ricochet of my thoughts and various philosophers' ideas working into the wrinkles lining this cloth. I notice that these bends and folds are all shaped in the same direction, creating a striation, a striping of light and shadow.

How can teachers use my metaphor in cloth to consider spaces in schools with awareness of the fragile relationality within learning? I twist the two flattened pieces back into the molded knots reminiscent of the ties or wrappings that Robert and I used when we originally placed the fabric. Then I straighten out the cotton once more as I contemplate this question, listening to the softly urgent drumming of rainfall. Wood shapes cloth: spaces shape people. As artist, I can loosen these ties and create new ones. But to do this, I need to explore my spaces and seek ways to express what I find there. I consider a strategy of becoming a stranger so that I can understand and critique social norms embedded in ideas about space. I go out into the rain to look again at that tree in the corner of my yard and remember the fabric I had placed there.

Every morning I would check on the cloth that I had tied to the tree in my back yard: a little ritual of wood, cloth, and weather, connecting my inside to my outside. For weeks, I watched the cloth react to the climate.



Freezing in melting snow,

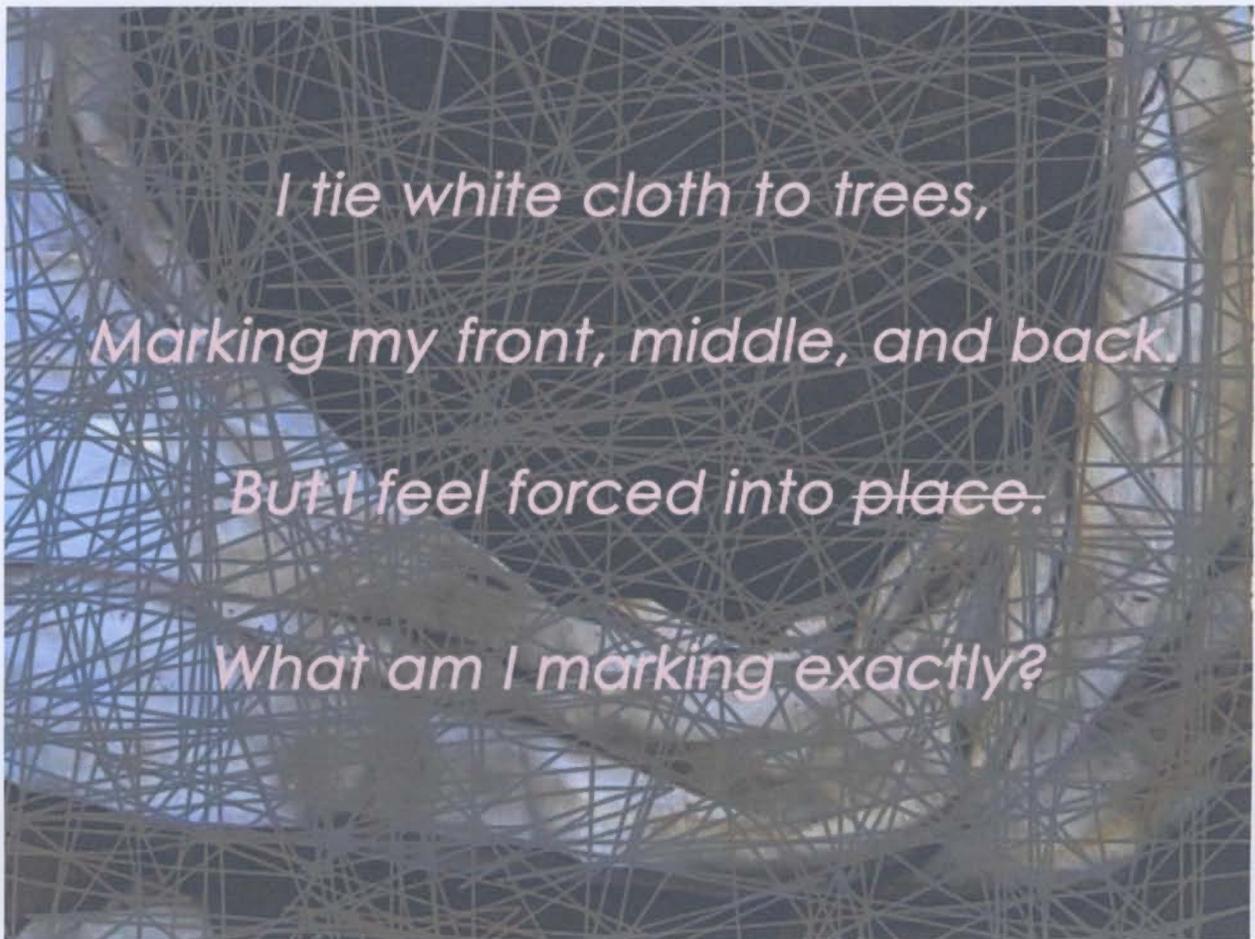
Fading brittle in the sun,

Flapping in light breezes,

Tearing in strong winds,

Dripping in rainstorms.

It glowed an eerie white in moonlight, and it blinked brilliant in strikes of lightning. Lightening of thought came to me slowly as the cotton stayed tied and I stayed tied to it. I watched the cloth for a long time; leaving it knotted to that tree, to become dirty with the weather and animals. A kind of meditative inertia edged into my thoughts, and I felt the pressure of that cloth tied to that tree, undoing me. I write in shorthand poetry - four lines.



During those days of watching the cloth I struggled with the significance of my little poem: there was something nagging me. As I work on the cloth with hindsight in my hands, I know why I ended the poem with a question and why I erased place. I cut through the written word, with a Derridean flourish, a caution that the sign of place is errant, mischievous, and teasing me into a false security of stability. Like a shocking flash of cold, I am jolted away from the warmth of presuming words or images are transparent: in place.

In addition to standing as a marker for the wildness and unpredictability of weather, this cloth assumed a more solemn yet fugitive meaning. The placing of the cloth at the boundary of this space of my backyard reveals my sense of being forced into place. As a woman, along with other women, I live with normative limitations of place and space. I hold these limits as wariness, deep within me like veins hold my blood. Regularly, space, leaking darkly, makes borders between public and private messy. The ways that these spaces seep into each other is always wiped clean and borders reformed when space is shared with strangers. The possibility that dangerous men could traverse shared spaces subtly influences the ways I negotiate my movements. The darkness

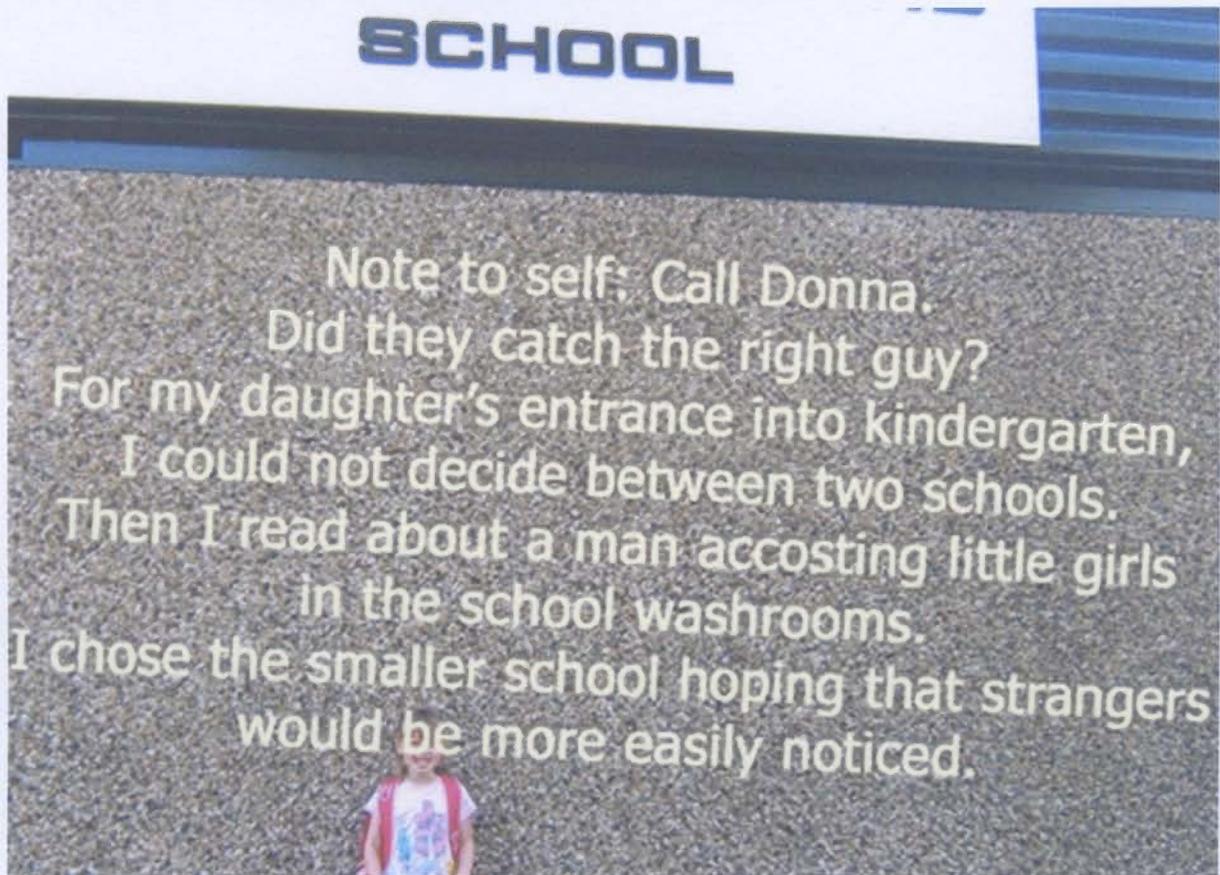
is a foe: the proximity of one figure on a lonely street makes me slightly nervous. I avoid certain places. These are assumed and naturalized conditions of my life.

Hegemonic structuring of public spaces, such as the park, the mall, or the street, that are so familiar they seem socially irrelevant, insinuate the scientific, Euclidean account of absolute, infinite space that informs the tradition of mapping methods using grids as lines of division that is the norm of white hetero-masculinity (Huffman, 1997). It insinuates a right to occupy such spaces and to use them for individual purposes. Feminist scholars point out that this dominant interpretation of space eliminates others' experiences (Blunt & Rose, 1994; Grosz & Eisenman, 2001; Nash, 1994). Thus, issues of physical safety limit public space and create boundaries for the rest of the population: women, homosexual men, children, and animals (Rose, 1993). Grosz (1995) makes the connection that any understanding of subjectivity is contingent on an understanding of space and time, and considers that women interpret space and time differently from men. The alignment of space into public and private is one condition of this difference.

Till (2001) outlines the familiar, traditional division of private space as female and public space as male in the structure of gendered roles within society. In her study of early twentieth century Germany, often when women who were mothers worked, it was implied that they were irresponsible. While in other cultures different representations of gendered roles exist, I would contend that in Canadian popular culture these traditional roles of male and female are still evident.

There is often no clear division between the private and public, especially with regard to schools. Schools can be perceived as thresholds in between public and private spaces. School is not home but it could be closer to home than many who hear the word *institution* realize. The ways that schools become comfortable often happen in the spontaneous, unwritten spaces that are outside, underneath, or in between the organized day. I imagine the possibilities if these openings were valued and given proper time and space. The familiarity of routines practiced with known classmates and teachers in shared, physical spaces act similarly to some private spaces: for example, the assignment of students to their homeroom. This does not necessarily mean that these spaces are any safer, but there exists a potential for a sense of belonging within a school that models a metaphor of the home. Controversially, however, schools also have the capacity to undervalue the type of work that is essential to a successful home space. Children conform to the public workplace rather than home and raising children. In this way schools are very public

institutions, wrought with the same conditions found in public spaces.



Giroux (2005) has lamented that it is unfortunate that we associate the public sphere with such fears and inhibitions, rather than as a potentially active space where people feel a power to make social change happen. While he makes an important point, I speculate that many of the population do not glance over their masculine shoulders in the dark too often. However, critical pedagogues would be among the first to admit that the public/private threshold is indeed a very convoluted, unstable social space.

The myriad ways that we interpret the subject and art with regard to space, and acknowledge the biases within these concepts have complex developments in the North American context. Major positions which inform current theories of space include the Cartesian space of the absolute and infinite; the phenomenological, experiential space and place of our conscious construction; and the critical, discursive space and place that interjects time as flow and as event. Various permutations of these general understandings can be seen within landscape art, within educational research, and within conversations and art in this project. The pieces of cloth are marked within the framework of these related notions of subjectivity, place, and space: the classical tradition, the phenomenological approach, and the post-structural direction, and reveal the ways that ideas about the subject evolve, tied as they are to space and place.

As I work on the cloth, I favour a critical, discursive interpretation because it best resonates with the ways that I have traveled through spaces with others. Thus, while acknowledging that the various positions stated here are always present, I organize the project within a post-structural understanding of space and place as I make a different kind of landscape art. However, in order to locate this postmodern perspective, its emergence that was catalyzed by an absolute notion of space warrants examination.

Space idealized: I think therefore I am extended to you in space



Wood landscape manipulated by author

For many of us, space is absolute, empirical, and measurable using the three axis of Euclidean geometry. The metaphors for this Euclidean space that have been created in various writings are telling of this Cartesian idea of space in relation to the subject. It has been referred to as an empty container to be filled with the actions of people, as a blank canvas, as a theatre backdrop, or as the open, infinite outer space of the universe (Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine, 2004). In all of these metaphors, this infinite space is interpreted as being disconnected and separate from all bodily involvement: there is space and there are things in it. The Cartesian, autonomous subject can be located in this absolute, measurable space. This a priori subject enters into a vast infinity of space and thinks and acts within this emptiness, shaping and naming places. Unfortunately, this ideal mode of thinking can lead to all sorts of disregard for the land, as ecological systems are viewed as separate from the conditions of existence: they are to be used, controlled, and shaped in various ways depending upon the whim of those in power.

In landscape painting, positioned at the threshold of geography and art, images of scenic vistas are representations of this interpretation of space as absolute when they are structured using one point perspective, where the viewer is separate from the view. Images of places using this mathematically based device introduced in the Renaissance, and later developed in Dutch landscape painting, subtly reaffirms the social imbalance and inequity that is the fabric of our shared spaces. Places are never really experienced from a singular viewpoint as is the illusion that this form of representation suggests. By doing so, one privileges this way of seeing over other ways of perceiving. The traditional uses of one point perspective in paintings “represent masculine images of power that satisfy erotic and power desires for control and possession of the landscape and work to affirm and enhance masculinist social power structures” (Huffman, 1997, p, 266). Historically, with painting, the other senses gradually came to be constructed as

undependable in comparison to sight, and this privileging of sight over the other senses has been the masculine domain, with women having been relegated to the lesser sense of touch: read lesser arts (Huffman, 1997; Mitchell, 2002; Sanders, 2004).

In the context of education, the notion of Euclidean space manifests in the linear structures inherent in learning theories of the child. These structures designed to measure the development of the student, for example, in the work of Piaget and others, are no longer perceived uncritically (Lesko, 2001; Popkewitz, 1999; Walkerdine, 2001). We have come to recognize in many instances that the homogenization of child development into a linear series of stages can make us biased with regard to differences. If the norm is assumed according to these universal levels of achievement we tend - even subconsciously - to compare our students in these kinds of rubrics. Thus, the normal begets the abnormal and we all suffer from this inflexible categorization of students. It is not only in learning theories that Euclidean space seeps into our social imaginaries. The many naturalized references to geometric, spatial metaphors within everyday language influences the ways we perceive linearity in English-speaking, Western countries in subtle ways (Davis & Sumara, 2006).

Alternative ways of mapping, and of creating landscape art shift established norms by introducing doubt into the assumed hierarchy of absolute space (Blunt, 2003; Rose, 1993). The idea that space and place are politically neutral, objective, and absolute is shattered when Lefebvre (1991) claims that this constructed nature of space is actually the space of capitalism. Even the very declaration of being non-political is part of this bias, but it is so normalized that we do not recognize it (Ibid, 1991). Traditional landscape art can be seen as a symbol of this abstract, capitalist space. Lefebvre focuses on the political aspects of cultural space in the ways that we identify places, act, and imagine within them. Specifically, I focus on the political aspects of social spaces by making art to rupture these norms of Euclidean space. Creating landscape art such as the proximity of buried cloth, and the tying of cloth to a tree allows me to interrogate my attitudes about shared spaces. In this exploration, I comment on limiting norms within my culture.

In a similar gesture to mine, Robert has also wrapped a cloth around a tree, and is also aware of borders and boundaries, but in a different way. The cloth around the tree represents his space in the world; his property where, within a small, green space in an urban context, it is a marker for his connection to place as home. The strong connection of physical place to subjectivity does occur in the act of making a place a home. There is not the same fear and restriction however, that infiltrates my tied tree; constricted. His is a boundary equally separating him from others.

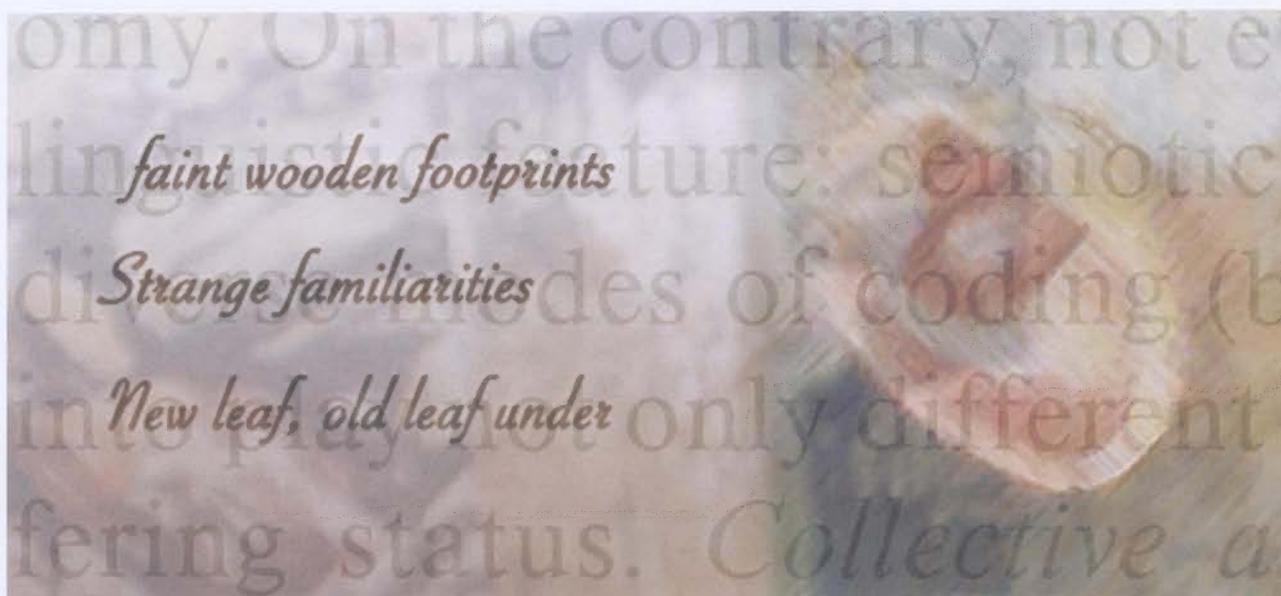
This kind of boundary creates a sense of security rather than a negative feeling. In what Davis and Sumara (2006, p. 147) call “enabling constraints”, the border here allows Robert a sense of freedom. The security that comes from limits, in this case, the borders of his home, ironically is what allows him to go beyond these borders. The difference in the interpretations of tying or wrapping a cloth around a tree is profound for me and I return through these cloths to the spaces and places of schools. I speculate that similar relationships within school spaces create either an enabling sense of agency or a disabling uneasiness for students.

The importance of place in the processes of learning is often based in physical environments of schools, as a measurement not unlike the absolute spaces of Cartesian subjectivity, where infinite spaces of the school are partitioned into localized places. It is a geometric architecture that is central to the organization and control of the population. The reliance on the physicality of the school is a literal thinking of space in and around a building. This is a common aspect of considering place in education, for the practicalities of moving bodies, positioning bodies, and orchestrating bodies in a regulated way as a system of functionality and organization in school culture. Not only do boundaries physically and psychologically keep children safe within a familiar limited space that allows for exploration and the imagination to emerge: it also controls them.

There is no denying the influence of specific spaces and places upon the subject. Where we are does influence who we are. I consider the political ramifications of situating these influences among other possibilities in the formation of knowledge and the subject. There are other ways to conceive of the learning subject that call these geometric limitations of space into question. Specifically, the manner in which difference is understood in conceptualizations of space is pivotal. In a post-structural understanding, both place and space are seen to be synchronic events that are influenced by various political and social forces (Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004). Borders shift according to cultural influences. Within the metaphors of network, flow, and mobile spaces, place is no longer only an identified, localized division of space, but as part of a physical, imaginary, or virtual relationship in which difference and identity continually surface (Ibid). A site does have specific characteristics that identify it as different from other places, but places are perceived as flexible so that the subject does not develop into a fixed point in space or in time. Therefore, space and place, like subjectivity, are seen as always in a state of becoming. In these assemblages of self, space, and place, boundaries and borders flex, thin, or thicken with social constructions and reconstructions within power relations. This metaphor of flow is reminiscent of the way Nancy has described sense as both singularly concrete and ideal – the

threshold in relation that is meaning translates here to this consideration of place and space as continually emergent, based upon contextual cultural and political forces. Places and sites as art become interruptions within this metaphorical flow. I learn to look carefully and differently at very familiar places and social spaces through these actions with these pieces of cloth.

Stranger (than) theory



The places I travel have shrunk with the nurturing of babies. Where I once moved around countries, I now move around the corner: a school, a neighbourhood yard, a grocery store, and a gas station. My two children are here walking these local routes with me, and this same world that is so physically small for me is hugely wondrous for them. This is one of many lessons they have for me. A shift in perspective and familiar places are re/cognized and acted upon very differently. I become foreign in my place and I begin to un/learn.

But by realigning ourselves in contradistinction to the familiar, using strategies to make ourselves strangers in our places, we move the space of the learning subject from a mooring within Cartesian stability to a dynamic opening and becoming. Making ourselves strange involves regarding difference as an opportunity for new knowledge. The ways that our understanding situates us also limits us, and this dual reality can hinder learning. Years ago, scholars, Pinar and Grumet, (1976) and Greene (1995) encouraged educators to embrace the stranger in educational practices. Ahead of their time, they realized the potential in imagining teaching that opens possibilities for understanding our familiar routines in reinvigorating ways.

Sumara and Davis (1998, p. 87) endorse this strategy of "re-arrang[ing] the familiar" to create opportunities to see with innovative eyes. Such strategies can begin with the familiar: tracing the histories of the influences of various places and acknowledging our debt to place while moving within unfamiliar spaces. Imaginative inquiry into the autobiographical through aesthetic investigation is one strategy for reshaping familiar spaces and places in order to see

them differently. In moving toward the stranger these encounters with others become the venues for self-understanding. Art practices, as forms of creativity, are steeped in such ways of reading possibilities of seeing and feeling the familiar as the unfamiliar.

Artist/educator, Rollins (2005) also appreciates the dynamic of place in learning and subjectivity. He points out the complexities that are involved in the ongoing emergence of self when considering place. He notes, “We have learned that while it is essential to know where you come from, it is also essential to realize that you are not ONLY where you come from. You are where you are right now, and prophetic and most important, where you are going” (Rollins, 2005, p. 6, capitals in original). These densities in the dynamic relationships of the formation of the subject are also suggested in Ellsworth’s (2005) portrayal of the complexities of learning, reminding us that our bodies in places include the real and imagined, public and private, past and present. In this way, place signifies the uniqueness of the learning encounter.

Learning never takes place in the absence of bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history. It always detours through memory, forgetting, desire, fear, pleasure, surprise, rewriting. And, because learning always takes place in relation, its detours take us up to and sometimes across the boundaries of habit, recognition, and the socially constructed identities within our selves. (p. 55)

My students usually knew what I was about when I would suggest a moving day. “Let’s reorganize the desks.” I would exclaim with enthusiasm. If I really wanted to make the room strange again, to capture our sense of emergence, to un/familiarize ourselves - everything and everybody, including neighbours, would be changed. Part of this need for physical and social change, I realize in retrospect, was an unconscious desire to regain a sense of control that, as a teacher, I gradually lost to informality as September faded into a distant autumn. But it was a small part, really. Changing the room was mostly about Ellsworth’s (2005) “breaking boundaries of habit” and gaining a renewed curiosity and energy about learning and teaching.

Considering the influences of place on me hints or gestures to the unseen and unknown. Place traces over and laces through the power relations as I let my imagination take hold in shared spaces and as I urge my students to do the same. By approaching my teaching with openness to the flexibility of place and space, and consequently to whom I might become, I can consider learning as a shared experience within difference.

But how do I relate in shared spaces to a different point of view? Understanding? Empathy? Rejection? Confusion? Oblivion? A child stabs another within touching distance of my closed, classroom door. Inside the safe classroom, our music is jolly and masks the noise of the

altercation. Years later, I still feel the burn of that door. And I see through my blindness those students' interpretations of the safe and unsafe zones within a school are as obtuse to me as my spatial limits are to some men.

I could have been wiser. To assume there is automatically physical, emotional, or social safety in a school because I am secure is an important mistake I endeavour never to repeat. But I probably have made it more than once, in subtle, unconscious ways that reflect the conditions of my white, teacher position of power. McCaskell (2007) and Wihak (2007) remind me that to address the racial and class privilege that is entwined with my teacher position, I must first recognize my position is one of many rather than a norm against which others are defined. This is actually more difficult than it seems at the important level of common, daily routines and activities within educational spaces because the very structures and spaces in which we teach are greatly influenced by this norm of white hegemony. Within art classrooms, under explorations of the possible and powerful strangeness of art, teachers and students can begin to question and create alternative views of our subjectivities and our places so that shifts in values and perceptions of "normal" are possible.

Similarly, in my research, to assume philosophical safety in established hierarchical structures among ideas is not the best approach to learning, especially not if it eventually becomes some kind of consensus that is a dialectical squash: a sitting of a fatter philosophical bottom onto one of skinnier logic and thinner vocabulary. That kind of linearity is not helpful for me as a scholar and artist because the multiple thresholds among ideas are lost in this kind of philosophical closure. A trail of discarded ideas is left as ideological pollution within such definitive acts of choice. I need to be able to reverse, recycle, and reconsider ideas as contexts change and emerge. If the threshold can hold without falling into judgments of better and worse, then I look to spaces in my art, research, and teaching where middles remain powerfully in the middle. Here a tapping from any idea could become tied into the knot of my cloth. These are pedagogical moments that are dynamic, mobile, and rhizomatic¹⁹ in structure.

Outside my garage, next to the wall, grow those little green vines that curl up and close when touched. I wait silently and impatiently for the leaves to unfurl, so that I can perform this little miracle again and again, until the vine finally stops closing. It stays open regardless of the pressure of my touch. It has lost its ability, tortured into an opening that is permanent. The ways that power is used and abused in this inconsequential botany lesson of limit and scale returns me to the classroom. There is an uncanny sense of the plant as animated, as it curls up and hides like a leafy crayfish out of water. What do I learn from this lesson in plant persecution? How do I call

myself out on my desires, so strong, but harmful to another and to the land? How do I remember that sharing means awareness of a certain kind of impermanence of power and control within existence? The traces of power relations within the world of art, within the land, and within education are key. Art about the land can function as a way of exposing the seemingly permanent political hierarchies within shared spaces.

Sporadically, within visual culture we are offered a saga of those who control the land and those who confront established power. Information often devolves into disembodied fragments, yesterday's forgotten news, and the body in power may adjust only slightly. At times, such as in viewing the art within these participants' repertoires, I see testimony to the selfishness of such power in relation to my position. This gives me pause: the art that elegantly slices through the thick skin of familiarity can educate us toward awareness and possibly action. I value art as education when it aims at unfurling power structures in a kind of embodied knowledge, so that by creatively appropriating materials such as the very elements of the land, making art and considering it critically, art can move us toward social transformation. This is my interpretation of *being* through the landscape.

Robert touches on the natural force within the landscape as event in his interpretation of being through the landscape, and this acknowledgement of the land as continual, dynamic action expands my understanding of the educational possibilities of the artist in relation to the land.

Robert: I think that there is an active mark that keeps occurring in the work. There is an active surface. There is a sense of getting away from the posing of a landscape, and I like that word, the posed landscape. Too often we run into landscape work that is posed. It is like taking a picture of you and telling you to smile! That is a pose and that is not necessarily you any more. That is a pose of you. Too often that is what happens in landscape - it becomes posed. What we are getting is not a landscape - we are not getting a sense of the... the anger that is in the landscape: the wind, the noise that the wind makes, the rustling of the leaves, the trees breaking on the ground, the sky being in motion at all times. What we are getting is this pose. And I don't want that in my work. So I think that is ... my sense of place? I don't know if that describes my sense of place or not. It is my sense of my interpretation of the landscape. If I am interpreting the landscape... I don't know if I am always interpreting the landscape. I am interpreting my sense of being through the landscape.

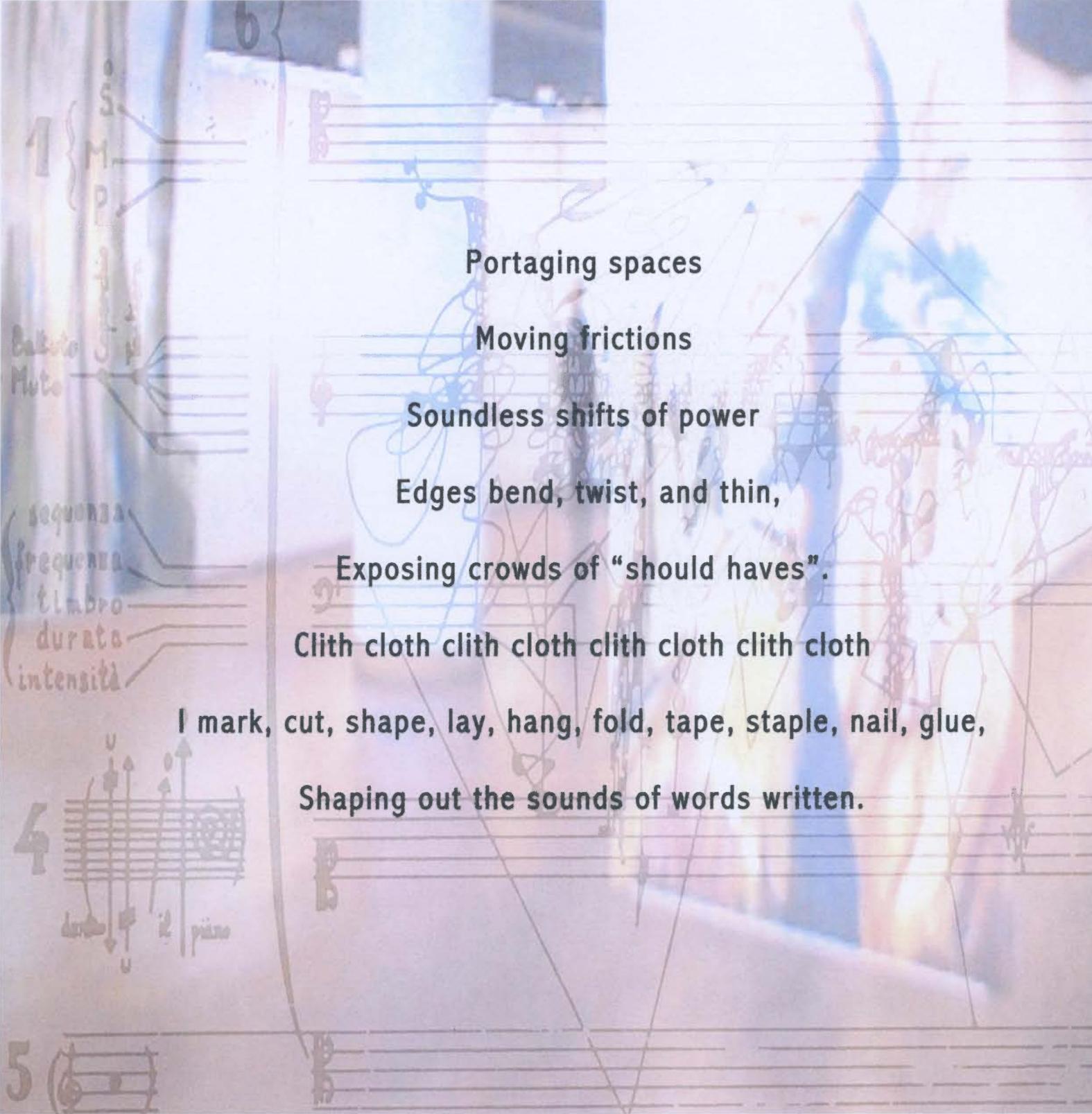
Interview #1



Black Hill 12, oil on canvas by R. Dmytruk

I compare Robert's desire to capture, with paint, the movement and energy of the land to my desire to capture and expose the power inherent in the creation of landscape art as a form of embodied knowledge and existential awareness. We both desire to represent the event of the living land. I recently tied another cloth to the same tree in my backyard. That tree has now been tied with cloth for months. The original cloth has evolved into a series of knotted landscape paintings. Landscape knots painted with the stylistic roughness and care that I accord a canvas or piece of paper. Robert's cloth is still in one piece. I make this piece heavy with the enabling security of home. Its surface textures are coloured with the same drag of paint that I employed for my tied, knotted pieces of landscape art but the resulting surfaces, in shallow relief, are long in shape and texture.

I sense my actions brush close to the environmental and educational complexities that are very intimate and local, yet have potential for national and global consideration with respect to identity and learning. These spaces that can shift within a work of art, within a school, and within general, public spaces of streets, malls, and parks once more take me to the edges, where a familiar place, action, or thought becomes catalytic as I manipulate the fabric.



Portaging spaces

Moving frictions

Soundless shifts of power

Edges bend, twist, and thin,

Exposing crowds of "should haves".

Clith cloth clith cloth clith cloth clith cloth

I mark, cut, shape, lay, hang, fold, tape, staple, nail, glue,

Shaping out the sounds of words written.

The space *between*: Dynamic threshold

Many scholars have supported a metaphor of a third space when thinking about relationships in learning in their consideration of the potential for more complicated interpretations of the subject. I envision the learning relationship as a void, or lack of space; this place of difference touching difference, as so framed by Derrida (2005) and Nancy (2000). If the educator becomes within this absence of space, where two diverse aspects touch each other, she is the threshold between, and as a void, dividing and holding together simultaneously, she is the act of contact between knowledge and student. What is similar in both metaphors, the third space or the void is a political plea for teachers to rethink the world: to reconsider their relationships with their students and with knowledge so that as educators they remain open to points of view other than those that calcify their worlds.

If I can shift my perception of the world from a stable system to a dynamic, relational, and evolving system, as some educational scholars propose pedagogues do, then I shift from an epistemology based on representation to one based on performance (Bai, 2003; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Doll, 2003; Fleener, 2005). It implies the shaking of binary structure. The dichotomies such as mind/body, nature/culture, and self/other become complicated when knowledge and learning are viewed as perpetually partial, fragmented, and unpredictable (Davis, 2005). I better attune to teachable moments within the flexible threshold between binaries. According to Doll (2003, p. 8):

Relational essence focuses on a situation not being reified, not being a “thing” isolated in itself (as so many school subjects are) but always in relation to the situation present. This focus on the relationality of a situation, on its process of being, is allied with complexity theory’s mode of considering relationality itself as always being in process, of always forming a dynamic system.

In a similar pursuit of conceptualizing a threshold, Aoki, has suggested that I, as teacher, rethink curriculum-as-plan to connect with curriculum-as-lived: that is, “the lived space where teachers and students dwell in face-to-face situations” (Aoki, in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 275). This shift is paramount in conceiving learning as an embodied experience. He reminds me of the importance of considering ethics in how I choose to live, teach, and learn. Aoki makes the important point that designing curriculum should not be done unless there is a personal connection with the other – that I hold myself ethically responsible for the well being of my students.

The Nancean community as emergent is echoed in Aoki's call to re-evaluate how I conceive of difference so that the binary of self/other morphs into a shared, dynamic relation that is curriculum-as-lived. Aoki (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 426) describes a threshold for teachers:

Here, I recall stories of thoughtful teachers who speak of their pedagogic struggles in the midst of the plannable and the unplannable, between the predictable and the unpredictable, between the prescriptible and the nonprescriptible. They're pedagogical where? – between the curriculum-as-plan and the live(d) curriculum. Sites of living pedagogy?

From a different perspective - that of the artist/educator, Irwin (2004) calls for inquiry that is re/researched in the third space between written and visual explorations. She calls for artists who are also educators to look at the function between and among the parts of understanding self. She welcomes a resonance of clarity and confusion in the spaces in-between the multiplicity of the identities as artists, researchers, and teachers. As Irwin (2006, p. 64) notes, "It is in this in-between space that chaos is appreciated alongside order, complexity alongside simplicity, and uncertainty alongside certainty". By theorizing in the threshold between binaries, Irwin finds opportunities for a living inquiry that enhances understanding about the ways that the self becomes.

I consider this as I knot my cloth repeatedly and then cut each knot free. They become floating knots joining nothing but parts of themselves. I reshape cloth from flat wrinkled surfaces to twists and bumps. I lay them down and begin to anoint these knots as landscape, as I would a canvas. Immediately the texture of line and fold is highlighted as I drag the black paint-covered brush across the form of the knot. Some of the knots are disappointments; like the thick of gold that I envision will look brilliant and rich as I dress one knot, but it only reflects minimally and becomes a glossy beige. I never desire gold paint in thin coats. I prefer the excess of paint. These knots, as landscape paintings, become metaphors for my desire to create a void: they are folded in on themselves, these pieces of fabric, thus they are self-reflective, as I imagine a void would be. In the absence that is created every time I make a choice, as I fold and cut and paint, I consider the nature of excess. I unfold Pat Beaton's charred commentary in cloth.



The flames die down into glowing coals that someone rakes out into a long, taciturn path. I have a vivid feeling of frightened anticipation, facing the red, smoldering ground, toes to the edge. Do I trust my feet to carry me over the untouchable? How does that work, walking on hot coals and not burning the feet? The only way to find out is to act because this is body knowledge. Just the heat and me. But will I burn?

Personal Diary, Japan.

**Traffic in the wilderness *and* red blanket stitches unraveled: Learning to burn
slowly with absent meaning**

In the early morning I shuffle through some photos that have recorded Pat Beaton's actions with one of her cloths. I recognize her mother, sitting in the dark, in front of wood that has been piled onto the flattened cloth. It looks like a ghostly, flying carpet and the chair is precariously touching the edge, ready to tumble or take off. Pat's memory of this event of burning the cloth is recorded in the delicate movements of her fingers over the lacy, burned and blackened edges of the fragments that remain. It is this rim of a burned circle that is her focus as she talks, and it later becomes mine as I manipulate the cloth. The other pieces of fabric are piled around me on the table, and I take this burned one out into the sun to give it room. I need space to think about this burned border. There is a threshold here that is catching my attention. I look closely at this edge - it is so convoluted: curving, fraying, and curling. I review the beginning of this transformation of fabric into landscape art.

There is dampness in the air, blown on ocean winds that travel up the valley, past the bustle of the city, picking up the smell of pulp mill, then through the forest, the sweetness of pine mingling with other traces. Surrounded by quiet of evening, she stretches and flattens out wrinkles in a piece of cloth that, once white, carries the markings of her afternoon. Years ago, I saw her in a similar position; her back stretched over endless cotton, flattening it over a large, wooden floor. Stocking feet - hands and knees. We walked around its edges mostly, hugging the walls because this work demanded the entire floor. I watched as she and her mother laboriously pinned small squares into a quilt of hand-pulled prints.

Memory, imagination, and desire in ochre, sienna, and umber on pale cloth, anointed and dyed with tea. Overwhelming work of oversize, this quilt that she made was so large it brought her to her limits. To her knees. And hands. In the end, wings of birds or angels appliquéd onto the reverse, disconnected shadows backing images of quiet women, undone circles, and emotional animals; lines of witnessing, of naming in image. A quilt, in the end, so big it would dwarf any bed, subverting this utilitarian reference to history of women placed - in their place. This was a quilt made into a painting, its scale mocking the contentious, masculine history of brush and canvas. She stole it from the guys, stitch by stitch. But when done, artist and quilt circulate in a gallery system which has a gender imbalance so entrenched that it threatens to mould her to it. "Art is a man's name," we used to say. How we laughed.



Nine-Patch Irish Chain (mixed media) by P. Beaton. 13 x 18 feet.

Pat: I made an object that I can't see. It is so big that I can't pull it out and look at it. So I take this crated quilt up to where I'm going to exhibit it and I take it out and that is when I am able to see it again. It's just as much of a surprise for me as it is for anybody else to see it. I needed to make something where I couldn't see the entire process – I couldn't see the entire object because it was too big... [I wanted the experience] of not being in control, of how it would unfold.

Interview #1

This quilt-made-painting is quiet now, folded and placed in a cedar trunk, but even in storage it derides the traditions of women "placed". The hope is disengaged from chest, reshaped by this oversized art. It spills its excess into pressure on the sides, bottom, and lid of the chest from within, thinning the hope so that all we see is a box of wood. Significance has been reassigned. Even in storage this quilt-made-painting roars.

Pat's quilt unties the knot of gender imbalance within the institution of art. This quilt is threshold between painting, traditionally a masculine endeavour, particularly when the topic is landscape, and quilting, devalued in the art world as a feminine, domestic endeavour. By rupturing the binary of painting/quilt as fine art/craft, Pat draws attention to this hierarchy by surprising the viewer with this unruly, large fabric. In an aesthetic inquiry that reveals a similar strategy, Pat reverses commonly held assumptions regarding the tradition of the campfire.

Cloth campfire in performance

In the twilight, fresh with the trace of the ocean on her hands, Pat carefully places each piece of wood on her flattened cloth. She feels the small, hard bumps of gravel under her hands and knees as she adjusts the paper. Carefully and generously, she offers her mother a lawn chair. She lights the fire: a cloth campfire in the middle of a gravel road. She and her mother sit in twilight.



Burned fabric (after fire) by P. Beaton

Talk moves slowly around, as both women relax into the moment, memories of family campfires rising with the wood smoke – and something else. Some excess, an extra smell as the cotton has begun to burn. Unexpectedly slow, the crimson edges curl and blacken. A glow here and there as the fire digests dampness, drying the ocean from the cloth. The evening dew evaporates and quietly, the edges around the pile of flaming wood creep outward, slowly glowing red in a growing, jagged circle.

Finally the fire dies into the night. The cloth stops burning. The conversation drops to an observation here and there, the way familiarity molds words with silence. Suddenly the stars are bright and there are night sounds: rustles and murmurs of unseen animals. There is a faint blush of the city to the south, reminding her of why she has left. They move inside and go to bed. The mist dampens the smoldering embers, grounding meaning back to cloth: burnt and cold and wet. The fire recorded in cotton ash and empty space.



Fabric burned by P. Beaton

Usually the campfire is the finale after a day of recreation in the outdoors. Generally, in Canada, the third weekend in May signals the beginning of camping season and the first weekend in September signals its end, in anticipation of the cold winter. I draw this recreational rhythm in contradistinction to the agrarian calendar upon which the school year was originally based. Camping and campfires signify the Canadian myth of the wilderness nation. Fully aware of the connection between nationalism and camping, Pat's artistic comment of burning the cloth as a campfire invites me to question the ways that I, and others take camping forays into the "wilderness" as a right of living in Canada. Through this campfire as art, Pat opens a visual interrogation as to where this recreational land-use fits with obligations and rights concerning the land.

During the morning before this performance, she had unfolded the cloth from her knapsack, so inviting and full of possibilities. In a gesture of curiosity she had put it down on the same gravel road of the evening fire. The afternoon sunlight was long as her shadow had moved back

and forth, reflecting her industry. A long, white road on the road. She had gunned the standard slightly and shifted into reverse. With an arm on the cab window of the truck, she had craned her neck, caught herself looking for oncoming traffic in the wilderness, had smiled and released the clutch. Tires crunched over gravel and cloth. Again and again she rolled the tires, crisscrossing back and forth over the cloth, marking her city roots: tracks on a cloth, on a road, in a raw place.

So here you now sit, out of the travelling bag, gone from the quiet of a west coast logging road. Here, folded neatly on my shelf in the garage, like an illegal chain letter, you have come back to me, and I am slightly dismayed at your potential to absorb: cloth mopping up all meaning. I wring my hands.



Cloth from *Fire* manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

Excess, understood as extra, unneeded, superfluous, or outside of – these are all understandings that have relevance for teaching and learning. Rather than a straight metaphor from Pat's burned cloth to a relationship between student and teacher, the cloth is jagged and uneven. It is mute in its over-coding, burned with too many insinuations. It is unnamed and in excess of metaphor. Superlatives replace metaphor. Best practices. Finest art. Worst student.

There is an emotional attachment to such excessive descriptors that is telling of the educator's commitment to her students and of her power to judge them.

As an art teacher, I am sometimes too eager to fill in the holes and thus, erase all sense of excess in my efforts to conform to the time and space of the curriculum. In our practices, Robert Dmytruk and I have much in common. As high school art teachers, we constantly waver between administering our students' activities too much or too little. We are pressured by this role of art teacher, where the control that underscores our actions, this master/apprentice relationship that colours our relationships with students is subtly reinforced daily by schedules in the institutionalized spaces and times of classrooms.

Yet this teacher/student relationship is so full of potential whereby, "The sharing involved in teaching and learning is not a sharing between equals in terms of knowledge but is rather a sharing of an unpatronizing character between two people who are equally learners but at different stages of mastery... It is one thing then to prescribe a curriculum based on a rich conception of knowledge; it is another to ensure the richness of this learning" (Davis & Williams, 2002, pp. 267-268). It is the richness of difference that stirs the teacher and artist in me to re/search deeply into creative pockets. In exchanges with students I am often startled by the potential for my learning within our passing, intriguing moments. I like finding spaces of alliance and spaces of disruptive, brow-raising surprise when I teach, as it is when I make art. This kind of surprise is the powerful potential within a/r/tography, where teachers use their aesthetic creative process to understand on a deep level what it feels like to work within an uncertain place.

I take the meanings inherent in the feel of this fabric, and because of the event of burning and the event of the place selected for the burning, I think about the absence of cloth: the excess created in this absence. This supplement is both a replacement and an addition to the whole (Derrida, 1974). The hole in the center of this long stretch of cloth is significant. The burned hole is absent cloth, yet the hole is supplemental to the cloth. How can this absence be an addition, and so what? Why does this move me? What kind of power rests in this emptiness? That the literal absence as a hole in the cloth can add to the cloth, and at the same time replace the cloth, plays with the mobility of presence and absence, one continually referring to the other. Absence is the potential for presence and presence becomes destabilized with the possibility of its difference – the prospective of absence. While I have this desire to pin down the significance of this burned hole, I hear Derrida in my head lecturing me, "One cannot help wishing to master absence and yet we must always let it go" (1974, p. 142). In successive and continual chains of

signification, the play of presence and absence is created. The threshold of absence/presence generates an awareness of unreliability in what appears to be true. In one instance, Derrida writes that, "Without the possibility of *différance* the desire for presence as such would not find its breathing space" (Ibid, p. 143). The cloth is in the tension of presence and absence: in the cusp between time and place, where my desire to substitute it as metaphorical object of learning must always be tempered by the cloth's potential to "become" in relation to other influences and contexts.

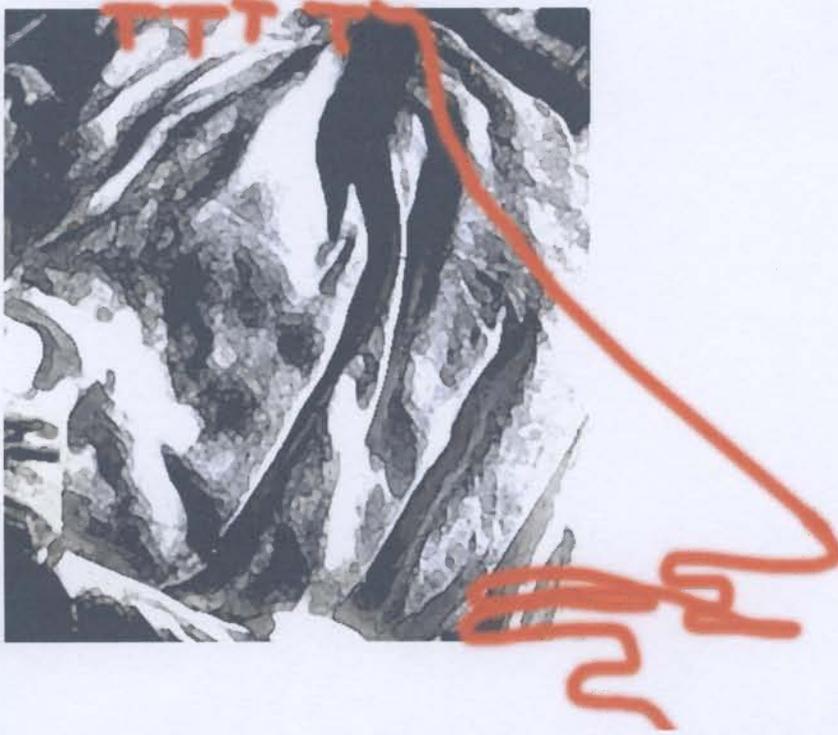
I glimpse in my hands, as I stitch the edges of this hole, where presence touches absence, one variation of Derrida's supplement, and honour his insistence that there is no definitive theory of the supplement; that it morphs and changes in context. A moment of theory translated in thread onto this burning of the cloth. "The intermediary is the mid-point and the mediation, the middle term between total absence and the absolute plenitude of presence" (Derrida, 1974, p.157).

From this middle, this threshold of absence/presence, I draw thin references to the emergent, learning subject. My mind wanders to the conditioning of education that sadly misses at its jagged edges. The edges marked by students who are in excess of the rules. Superfluous. The ones we fail. Now I have created a metaphor: my unconscious reaction as artist and educator. As incongruent a comparison of places can be, between the lonely, logging road and the classroom, I think about these two places and the event of burning cloth: the excess of the absent holes in learning and spaces that reside in the sharing of each encounter of exposure. The strange spaces where differences take form in between a look and a look: in a classroom with its mix of personalities, histories, and attitudes, or on the street with its mix of personalities, histories, and attitudes less known. These differences are the defining characteristics of each subject formed in relation to another, to be reformed in the next and all successive looks. While this engagement of difference between two singularities is the place of learning, it can also be the place of fear. What happens in the aftermath of the look, as touch that paradoxically separates and connects, is what complicates difference into action either as growing familiarity and understanding, or as violence. I consider strategies so that my students and the audience for my art are reminded of the fragility of this edge within difference, at the heart of social injustice in all places.

I am alone in my garage, staring at this hole burned into a length of cotton. How do I convey in this cloth the importance of understanding within the difficulty of difference?

I automatically touch the frayed edges, as Pat had done during our conversation. I reflexively repeat the motions of our conversation caught on video. This rhythmic gesture leaves me wondering why I so often understand the world through touch – within Nancy’s (2000) insistent and extended paradox of sharing within contact, it is that initial, visceral sensuality of touching – the concrete materiality before signification that I recognize. Scholefield (1989, p. 52) writes that “gestures are the pre-verbal link between the object and understanding” and I remember, like her, that my body has a memory that teaches me. I understand how my gender conditioning is influential. And there is an obvious link between being an artist and registering the world through the textures of contact. I think of Pat in all the galleries with her unruly, oversized object, disrupting perceptions of being in control. Even the ways that I am attempting to balance in thresholds, of beginning and remaining in middles, is a manner of seeking control over the slipperiness of meaning within difference. The random quality of fire becomes a souvenir for me as I let the art rupture through words, stitches, and brushstrokes.

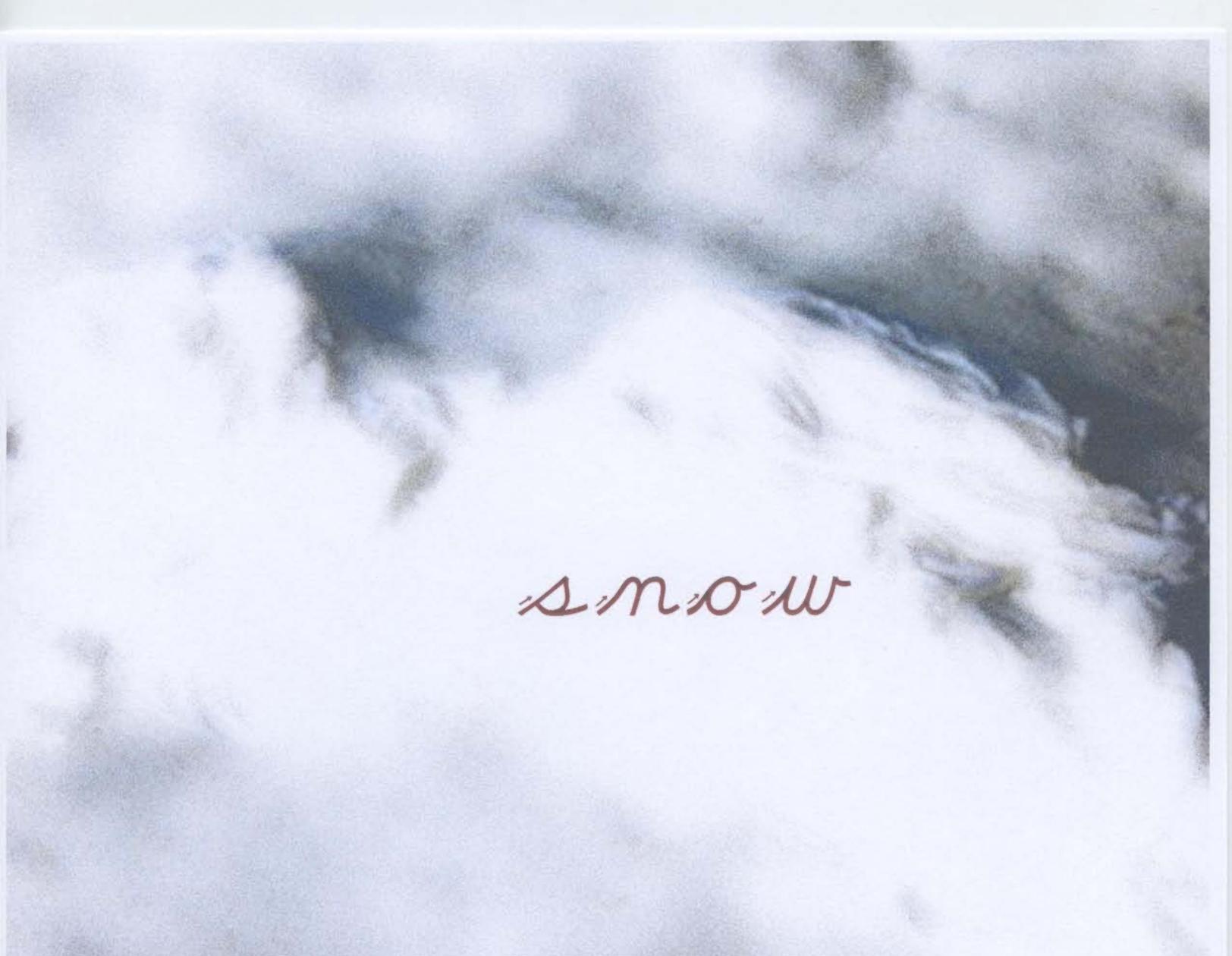
The tire marks on cloth, along with the burned hole in the cloth, extenuate the line of fire: a black, meandering line of curves in the shape of a large circle. I trace this line of fire with scissors, mimicking the uncertainty of fire, its slow and fast movements along an unpredictable path. The reversal of land and artist once more is evident in my marking, cutting, and shaping of the cloth under the supervision of the absence of cloth. Fire teaches.



The burned cloth

becomes the material space between the land and artist on one level, and between knowledge and teacher/learner on another level. Perhaps I am left with a loop of cloth that is a double line of fire trace, or one thick, random halo of cotton. I carefully stiffen the burned circle of fabric with more layers cut from its extended edges. The resulting circle of delicate curls, curves, and arabesques emphasizes the residue of fire. I stitch red and then pull it all out. A blanket stitch of red is too metaphorically transparent for my satisfaction. Red-threaded fire closes rather than opens possibilities. The meaning must falter. The meaning must raise doubt. This is the power of art, to leave us all in a quandary, allowing us the space to think something other than what we already know. It is a difficult place to remain for long, but a necessary place to visit repeatedly.

Some of the art of the participating artists has the potential to leave me this way, curious and unsure, yet enchanted. I am a bit mesmerized even while I critique a cloth campfire, glowing tents, journeys in pick up trucks, poetry on rails, thick brushstrokes of paint, and fences as art. The role of the artist as a public figure is shifted from the modernist paradigm where meaning resided in her genius to a signification within a greater configuration of context, audience, and materials. From within the anonymity of deepening snow, I identify some instances where art and social issues mesh. As educational encounters, I offer them as artistic gestures in this continual emergence of landscape art.



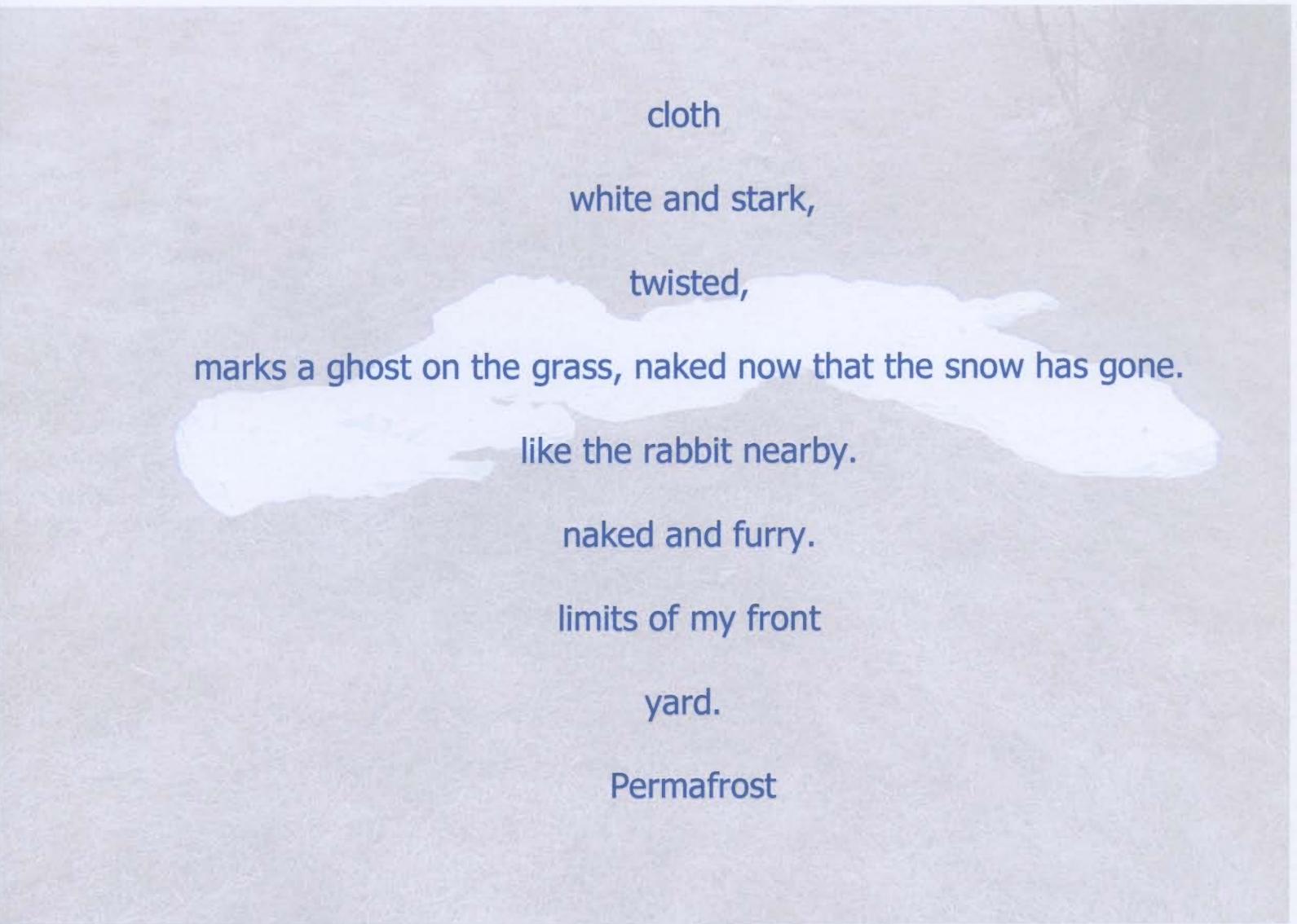
SNOW

Pat: Everybody [thinks she/he] is an artist, but they aren't! Artists have made a commitment to a practice. This is different from somebody who is coming into a project for recreation. It is different from a person's creativity. Being an artist takes years and years and years of figuring things out... a dedication.

Interview #1

Flakes fall and art melts frozen places: Political potentialities in monochrome

As flake after flake repeats the dance of descending, landing, and melting on my skin, in such movement I become part of the journey as I brush off the droplets of water. They fall in quiet, tiny splashes on the frozen ground. My movements with these cotton pieces mimic the sensation of falling snow, one art form transforming into another as they touch me and I touch them.

A photograph of a piece of white fabric, possibly a cloth or paper, laid out on a grey, textured surface. The fabric is irregularly shaped and has some darker spots, suggesting it might be wet or stained. Overlaid on the image is blue text, which appears to be a poem or a series of lines. The text is centered and reads: "cloth", "white and stark,", "twisted,", "marks a ghost on the grass, naked now that the snow has gone.", "like the rabbit nearby.", "naked and furry.", "limits of my front", "yard.", "Permafrost".

cloth
white and stark,
twisted,
marks a ghost on the grass, naked now that the snow has gone.
like the rabbit nearby.
naked and furry.
limits of my front
yard.
Permafrost

Late snowfalls are a surprise, coming after the sun has lulled us all into spring. Today, the walls of the garage have grown shadows, and it is not warm in here – I can see my breath. I would rather be outside in the proper, brilliant cold. I lay out this cloth because I read that we can expect snow. I want again to focus on the way snow covers all identity. Projects become mounds of anything and flat things disappear completely. I hope it will snow tonight so that this piece of fabric becomes anonymous once again. With the unidentified, with each feeling of

strangeness comes a creative opportunity to approach the cloth once more. I use this strategy to gain fresh insight as I consider this piece of fabric as a testimony to the roles of the artist in local places, as well as in national and global culture.

Snow is inspired by Peter von Tiesenhausen's second cloth. I agree with Barone as he comments, "Art is connected to a political act – to think otherwise is doing a disservice to society, to students, to artists – there is no private aesthetic imagination" (Barone, 2001, p. 147). I contemplate the role of the artist as social critic using two examples from the participants, and one from my work. Peter's art is an example of the way that art moves from cultural circles into legal spaces. Pat's art is a community project that is very site specific in its social commentary. Through my art I explore the artist as public persona.

As art production and reception have become dislodged from their permanent, modernist categories, the act of representation with regard to the structure of artistic production and reception has also shifted: currently, audiences, materials, and contexts of the public sphere are changeable and negotiable (Sheikh, retrieved 2006). Art becomes relationship among intention, context, and spectator. In this instance, as cloth moves into landscape art, unhinging it from the tradition of painting, it also moves to social contexts that differ from the institution of the gallery.

Witness



Witness by P. von Tiesenhausen

After a kilometer of trail he is warm, arms pumping as the skis slide over sheets of hardened snow. He enjoys the effort of his legs, the feeling of movement. The day is blue and white, hedged with a quality of northern, winter daylight, fugitive as afternoon creeps in. The sun is lazy on winter days, sneaking along the horizon. He knows all of the trees, notes as he glides, which ones are too near to the trail and might soon fall. He makes a mental note to return later with the chainsaw. He is almost at the end of his property, the wooded trail opening abruptly into field. Beyond is another wall of trees with trails winding through. He scans the landscape, remembering what is hidden.

He anticipates being off again. He pauses. The ground is too frozen to dig. There it is: a white mound at the corner marking the meld of forest and field. He brushes back the snow and rolls the rock over. Grabbing the cloth from his pack, he hastily folds and scrunches the edges in as he coaxes the small boulder back over the cloth. "Done," he thinks, surveying this border where the closeness of the trees and the space of the field bump into each other.

Peter: This is where the entrance was for the pipeline - to bring it in. The first one, years ago, so I thought it would be an appropriate place. It is between these two-quarter sections: this totally bush one here...and the main one with the field... To me it was about boundaries, about defining spaces.

Interview #3

Boundaries refer, in part, to the ways that unwanted intrusions cross into the lives of Peter and his family. Breathing the cold air deeply, he is suddenly reminded of sour smells of industry that invade his life: A shared air that respects no boundaries: no "defining of spaces", as Peter describes it, but only their deterritorializing abilities. He claps on his skis and makes for the other side. The wind is up now as he glides out of the trees.

Where and how are social interventions situated? In the classroom? In the gallery with the canon of dead, landscape painters ghosting the white cube? For Peter von Tiesenhausen, an isolated forest in northern Alberta became such a place where he challenged industry to be a better neighbour. When he was a child, Peter roamed the family farm that consisted of fields and forested areas and now his two sons enjoy these same places. Recently, oil and gas exploration led companies to the areas surrounding Peter's farm and subsequently, a number of sour gas facilities were built. Unfortunately for Peter and his family, one was built very near to his property and the resulting fumes wafted into their home regularly. After a number of attempts to have the gas company fix this problem, Peter began to engrave drawings of eyes into a stand of poplar trees near the border of his property and that of the gas facility.

I watch these resulting "eyes" on the trees watching with an eerie sense of anthropomorphism; the trees seem to stare, unblinking, and accusatory in silent protest. The eyes all face the direction of the gas site. While this artwork in itself was not a deterrent to the gas companies, the work led Peter to file a lawsuit against the company where he cited copyright infringement because the work of art in the stand of trees was becoming damaged by the fumes emitted from the industrial site. It was Peter's initiative to take the artwork into the legal realm, to shift the boundaries between art and the law that eventually effected how the gas company and others like it would do business with local communities in the future. The consultation processes

were changed to reflect greater sensitivity to the lives of the local residents. Thus, I describe this artwork as one small success story in the challenge of promoting changes to societal norms that are founded on exploitative practices. The relationship between the rural community and the gas companies changed with Peter's intervention to the advantage of the local residents.

The power of this work originates with the site, but also moves into spaces of the legal system, flowing within the shifts of power relations between artist and industry. In this way, the physical placement of Peter's piece of white cotton connects politically and artistically with the non-physical spaces of power with regard to negotiating land use. The sharing of the land between industry and local residents is a theme of development that is echoed in many places.

The Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project

In a second example of artistic intervention, a community project called The Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project, instigated by Pat Beaton, was successful in delaying municipal development with regard to a fallow plot of land where local community members had taken the initiative to create a shared garden. When the city indicated that the garden would have to be partially destroyed to make way for a rerouting of a garbage truck lane, Pat involved people through the grunt gallery, a local gallery in the area, to create a cedar fence with posts carved by school children, seniors, artists, gardeners, and other local members of the community. The fence was a success as a process of social intervention. Although the municipality never officially declared the site preserved for the gardeners indefinitely, it is still being actively gardened after ten years. The fence, while slightly deteriorated, stands as a symbol for the agency of artists within social discourses.



Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project produced by P. Beaton, Vancouver, BC.

There are many artists working locally, nationally, and globally, intent to move social conditions toward more equitable and democratic ends. Practically, whether the art accomplishes these intentions, on whatever scale, can only be established in the reception and circulation of the work. Disruption within expected definitions of art, such as art that masquerades as another kind of social activity, is a strategy that is employed in various ways by artists who are concerned

with existing social conditions. This kind of work is well established, and while it is not always clear to what extent the artistic interventions affect change, art can also serve as testimony to the necessity of social change. Pat Beaton points out that the measuring of the effects of this kind of art is not the most important or most relevant part of it. The involvement of people in the local, lived spaces and places, and in the creative process is change in itself. This is the important attitude that positions agency for artists. In this way they are educators within the public sphere, as their work has pedagogical implications in the creative ways it raises questions regarding our social conditions. Not the empirical evidence of social change, although this is positive when it is found, but the creation of art that initiates change within the individual and within the group who have shared the experience. In the simple but profound dissemination of an idea, or in the more tangible physical and social changes evidenced by the examples noted here, the imaginative potential of art can be an effective, social agent of change.



Mount Pleasant Community Fence Project (detail) by Pat Beaton

Artists who do this kind of work, such as those in this study, realize that there is a power within these acts that can surprise the viewer from complacency. Art that is normally considered as something else, such as a fence or a fire, can be confusing and controversial. Here, in this focus on the strangeness of artistic commentary about the world, is where artists' work has a potential for raising awareness with regard to social issues. This kind of agency, this power implicit in the imaginative quality of some art must not be undervalued, nor must it be romanticized. It serves a different function than art that dresses walls, such as the landscape art that others and I have created, where vistas are reproduced as decoration. This kind of representational painting functions to comfort and cocoon the viewer, who sees a reflection of her affirmed values, without surprise, without concern, and without difference. Art loses a powerful source of social agency and education when it merely reproduces nature.

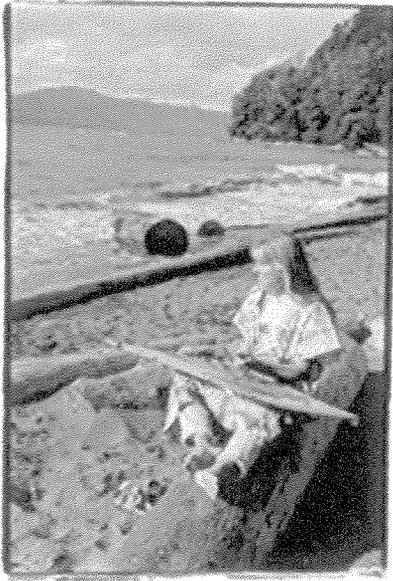
Peter: [Art] can go into those other realms and people will create their own meaning and eventually it will become a meaningful society. That's my hope for the work. I'm not going to make stuff just to make your walls pretty; I couldn't care less about your walls.

Interview #1

While the connection of art to the political commentary is a fundamental assumption within many art historical and cultural conversations, it is still a message that requires underlining within some educational circles. The movement within art education toward an analysis of visual culture shifts toward the goal of a politically informed art that reflects current societal realities. Changes to support curricular goals that are so aligned can have further positive effects. This entails a focus on the function of the artist within her society.

The artist project

In my work called The Artist Project, I comment on the ways that art leaves the land and circulates in the invisible, powerful market forces of commerce. My project focusses on our embedded assumptions and attitudes about the artist. In interrogating the ways that the artist is a cultural producer of a style, modeled after the neoliberal, modern subject, and is co-opted into a marketing structure within the art world, I question the role of the artist within her various communities.



Artist Project by author.

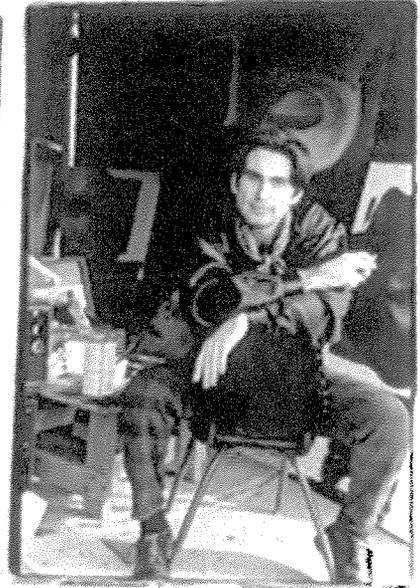


photo credits: R. Norbury and P. Pente

For over two years I painted in three distinct styles and created three fictitious artists, complete with names, photographs, biographies, artist statements, and exhibitions that I procured for all three at various venues around my city. I eventually had a “group” show where all of the works, along with the photographs of the fake artists, were shown together. The resulting show seemed to transform the alternative gallery into a commercial gallery, something I had not anticipated.

This project became a poignant, pedagogical experience for me when I shifted the hierarchy in my classroom and became vulnerable to my grade twelve students, presenting my role as idiosyncratic artist instead of teacher. I was very nervous, presenting my difficult art to my students. It was easy to present the realistic, and even abstract art to them because that was something to which they were accustomed. As their art teacher, they perceived me primarily as a “teacher” with artistic skill. This was a vastly different perception from how I was about to

present myself to them: as an artist who was unsure, quirky, and strange. I felt so exposed. As the images continued to be displayed, I explained my project in the third person, as the created personas in the work seemed to require. This is what disturbed the students the most. As one asked, "Why is she referring to her own work and to herself as he and she? Creepy." Eventually we had discussions surrounding their discomfort, the creation of public and private identities, and the role of the artist in society. The lesson turned out to be a success but it had been a private risk for me.

This project leads me to pursue an explanation for making art in a world of designer capitalism that can swallow any kind of political resistance and reinvent it as a commodity. Images and objects are always co-opted in this way through the marketing machine of the art world.

Pat: It is beautiful [the work of Andy Goldsworthy²⁰] but I have questions. There is this whole idea that he's not making objects. He is making objects: he's making these huge, coffee table books. There is a massive amount of object coming off of that man. They are beautiful and poetic. The documentation part of his work is as big as the event that he is creating by putting together the materials. And that is fine, but that is so not talked about. And people don't want to address that. Because you take photographs of that kind of stuff, and you make it look really good or really bad - but it is still just the same pile of rocks. And he has got an incredible sense of timing to know how that light is going to change on that object. And that's what is interesting about his work - is his timing, rather than what the object is, necessarily.

Interview #1

Currently, the place of the artist within the public sphere is based upon assumptions that artists work in a shifting space where neither artist nor spectator position is stable. Interpretations of the author/artist as contemporary, social critic and as a participant in the creation of social imaginaries that can inform public spheres firmly place her within community. Regardless of how the artist presents her art, she is already situated within society in particular ways. Thus, the relationship between the artist and the institution is tightly bound: wrapped.

The implications involved in understanding the role(s) of the artist in society are important for art education. Firstly, to continue to present artists in the modernist paradigm is to misunderstand the ways that many artists are deeply engaged within the creation of community. As I have indicated throughout this document, the neoliberal subject position that is tied to modernism does not best reflect the ways that artists are part of emergent local, national, and global communities.

According to Jagodinski (2005, p.130), “Art education is slow to respond where the majority of students live in their virtual and physical worlds. There are changes in perception that are enhanced by technology. But art education is fixed on representation.” It is on offering students difficult art about the land in addition to traditional landscape art of the canon that art educators can open avenues of discussion about the lived experiences of artists working in a global world. I repeat my claim that art education that only relies on the traditional canon leaves many current, socially attentive artists unacknowledged, creating a serious gap in students’ learning.

Secondly, and most importantly for me, because the modernist paradigm often belies the integration of artist as a working member of the emergent community, the potential ways that students learn to negotiate within difference are not explored. When art is left in definitive, traditional categories such as painting, sculpture, etc., borders remain firm and by extension, identity also is stationary. Thus, while students may not understand a particular piece or example of art, the fact that they recognize a model of art history that is a linear progression is often the familiarity of the modernist subject. This understanding does not account for simultaneous mixing of materials and categories that are currently the realm of so many socially committed artists. This narrows possibilities for considering difference in other areas of life. When students are faced, not only with an art piece that is beyond their initial understanding, but also an entire structure that questions the stereotypical role of the artist as isolated genius, it could lead to other interrogations about community, such as those based upon Nancy’s notion of being-with, as previously discussed. Additionally, students may consider positive strategies when facing other cultural differences: there could be a shift in values. White (2005, p. 91) states that, “the search for a definition of art has been abandoned and replaced by the identification for art possibilities”. Discussions are necessary that present possibilities in art as perception about the social, political, and existential world, and not merely as representation of a physical world already available to many.

After the theoretical, anti-aesthetic²¹ turn of the 1980’s, painting did not seem to connect with contemporary visual culture. Schor (1997), sums up this difficulty encountered by painters. “Painting, in particular, was targeted as incapable of adequately responding to a culture saturated by media images, unless it were used in an ironic and appropriative manner, and art history was strictly policed for appropriate applicability” (p. xiv).

Since that time, painting has once again been redefined as meaningful aesthetic experience in relation to contemporary art practices. When I am not painting, I am not completely convinced of this. Significant artistic practice emotionally and intellectually communicates on a number of

levels simultaneously where context, form, and meaning are inseparable. Meaning is created in the act of interruption and interrogation of social norms. Art can speak to a variety of people on one or more of these levels concerning issues that affect our contemporary times and situations. Sometimes the importance of aesthetic practice is in its ability to reach across cultural and physical boundaries in order to comment poignantly about some notion of our interior and secret selves, and possibly to create a place that we feel obliged to question these private, hidden parts of our selves.

Artists rarely make work that is unified, consistent, or in one medium, despite popular categories that tend to assume this. I recognize as one part of my work that painting watercolour completes me so that I can reach other limits in alternative media. Watercolour is about attending to craft. The reverence to minute detail in every aspect of the process is the important lesson for me. Time given generously to one's craft, be it art and/or teaching, is of paramount importance. I learned something about the importance of dedication to process from the potters, indigo dyers, and paper-makers of Japan.

I sit in a small cave carved out of a hill on the property of Mr. Otsukawa. He is a fourth generation potter in the Otani tradition. This means that he makes pots big enough for a large man to stand inside. He makes perfectly symmetrical, round, unadorned, subtle, brown, and grey pottery of large and small sizes. He lives in the country, surrounded by rice paddies, and the occasional car lot. There are broken bits of brown and grey pots strewn all around. And then I see shiny turquoise shards and am pleasantly surprised by the sparkle of colour. The earthen kilns are wood fired. They are built right into the side of the hill. But the cave that I am in is empty but for a rough wooden bench. Mr. Otsukawa raises his finger to his lips for silence and I listen. Nothing but vague, distant sounds from the buildings afar. A dog barks. After a few minutes of listening to my breathing, I smile at him.

There is a quiet and constant sound of a drip, as water slowly, drop by drop, falls from the darkness of the cave ceiling to a plank of wood below. We sit in the cold, damp, semi-darkness, so refreshing in the July heat, and listen to these drops of water. I am enchanted, but part of me thinks about the foreigner thing, and I doubt that Mr. Otsukawa comes in here much any more to listen. Or

maybe he does, to have a quiet smoke. But I, the outsider, remember it, now, years later, and I am reminded to slow down and notice details. I am still enchanted, despite my waves of cynicism.

Personal Journal, Japan.

In this project, I do not set out to make performance art, a genre of art that grew out of a political aspiration to circumvent the market forces that would engulf it into the very system much of this kind of art seeks to avoid. It rarely does avoid co-option, however, because very often the documentation that is used is assumed to be transparent and thus, it becomes the commodity, whether in a physical form or in the form of the artist's reputation. In this way, funding opportunities are more easily acquired, and ultimately the trickle into the designer capital world that originally the artist was against co-opts her. Art that lays bare, or resists is not only found in the intransitive art of performance. Artistic interventions as art objects can also be powerful expressions that highlight current cultural states of being. Neither kind of art is exempt from the currency of the world but that does not mean that important social issues are not effectively assessed in the art. Despite this fact that art becomes co-opted into the market, it still holds the power to influence, surprise, and educate, and is an important option for a critique of the social injustices in the neighbourhood, the nation, and the world.

I visit Pat Beaton in Vancouver. She makes subtle and complex pieces of art next to the largest ocean on earth. Pacific, salt waves lap as we walk the docks, a favourite place for Pat. Along our walk, the debris and excess of city structure jumbles and crowds our path: rusted wire, nets of jute, coils of frayed, dirty, nylon rope, iron wheels, and curves of rusted metal stacked higher than I can reach. The shapes and variety create an art installation for us as we talk about inspiring bits of what we see. This route is where Pat often is motivated for projects. Like Peter's work, the process for Pat often entails a conversation with materials usually identified with construction.

There is disdain in her voice for the reshaping of her neighbourhood for the Olympic village. There are flat, clean, sandy surfaces marked off into squares now as the bulldozers scrape away the other histories of this shore – again. Temporary beach volleyball nets appropriate the site. And then we squeeze through an opening in the chained fencing and continue on. Strangely, it begins to snow in the faded sunshine. Objects become mounds of anything and flat things disappear completely. Blankets of monochrome.



white touches white cloth

silent trace of lost snowflake

melting in theory



Robert: I don't think originally I connected the stones. I was simply thinking of the material [cloth] but after the snow melted and I noticed how the stones had settled I realized how they were important pieces, connected to the material and the soil.

Interview #3

**Floating the Canadian Shield *and* stones jumping into the sea: Ending as
opening**

What is it about stone? Collecting stones is something Robert Dmytruk does with enthusiasm. Sometimes it becomes a family outing and at other times a solitary adventure. His dedication to this ritual has destroyed at least one set of shock absorbers on his car. He places one of his cloths under a large stone from his collection, and it weighs the fabric down when the wind threatens to tear it away.

Robert: I love the stones and I can't explain it. Just, I don't know. I see a rock... You don't know how sad I was because I left a lot of stones behind. I left a lot of rocks behind. I couldn't bring them.

Interview #3



I look at the video of Pat Beaton conversing seriously but rupturing and contradicting that seriousness by placing a large, smooth, round stone on top of the fire-cloth she had just neatly folded and flattened. Robert seeks them out on journeys into the rural fields of northern Alberta, risking backache and broken shocks to collect rock and more rock. Peter crumpled one cloth into a hollow under a boulder. My children have adorned their special places with rocks, pebbles, and stones. I have spent hours painting the textures and colours of stone.

Stones are beautiful, enduring, solid reminders of the land. They are strong. But natural forces can wear them away, can split them open, and can throw them violently. So while stones are indeed heavy, they are heavy with stereotypical metaphors. It is more interesting to consider a stone as drifting, as a star, still solid but moving, bright and light. In this way, I can relate stone to the flow of the other elements of the land, and so pry the granite from the Canadian shield of wilderness and float it up into my working hands. In this chapter, *Stone*, titled after the stones considered in the placement of the cloths by all three participating artists, I contemplate stone as star, brilliant against a darker background of prescriptive, uncritical art education, and this within an even blacker shadow of social injustice.

My conclusion to this project does not set off that flash of mild frustration I sometimes feel upon coming to the end of a good book – that sense of loss that creeps into the last page. My conclusion does not energize in the way that I feel upon leaving a theatre after the curtain call on an inspiring play; tired, but wanting to recount scenes and gestures, needing to relive them. My conclusion is not even the way I breathe deeply with the final note in a second encore, and cheer madly at the empty stage – that disappointment at realizing in the fading din that there will be no third song sung. These objects in cloth will still be here at the end, still twinkle with the dirt and stain of landscape. While there is no loss felt here as there is with the endings of some art forms, I find that I am reluctant to conclude with such finality.

To bring closure to a project such as this one would be a theoretical misnomer and so I resurrect the metaphor of the pause: the hesitation in the continuing engagement we all share with learning. This project is a temporary break in the usual proceedings of education. By pausing, I can look and feel around the landscape. I can see where I have been, and note that there are other paths waiting. If I consider that these eight cloths have indeed been on journeys, not as large and awkwardly elegant as Peter von Tiesenhausen's trip of sculptures and truck, but as unique motilities, I can reflect on my own journey as well, enmeshed in the fabric.

At the beginning, as I washed the starch from the cloth, measured, and cut it into pieces, I opened possibilities for it to become material threshold between art and pedagogy. The power and obligation of the threshold, to hold and highlight difference, requires a hovering... and only a hummingbird makes it look easy. Every *other* has to work at it, to remain in the middle. Hovering is difficult work. It is also important work with political ramifications of living in this world of rhizomatic relationships.

Through the placement of the cloths, this project became both hidden and visible. Four of the eight cloths were hidden: both of Peter's cloths were hidden, one under a rock and one under a

bridge; one of mine was hidden underground; one of Pat's was hidden under compost. Pat Beaton's decision to set her cloth, *Fungus*, under rotting compost inspired me to privilege scent over sight and in doing so, I considered, using Nancy's notion of finitude, a kind of agency within existential limitations; a familiar position in philosophical circles that was echoed by Peter von Tiesenhausen as freedom to create without exterior interferences or pressures. Also, the shift toward a continually emergent notion of subject and community based upon Nancy's singular plural being suggested to me the urgent need to reevaluate the ways we live together in the land. This *fungus* cloth remained in the shape of a quilter's square, as a nod to Pat's experience and to the physical site, yet the additions in thread, bead, wire, and other textures ruptured the quilter's organization, as the smells directed me to follow the marks of fungal growth. With this cloth, I tore open the neoliberal subject and community, creating a passage through to an alternative way of imagining collectivity. My artistic process of pursuing a sense of smell for this piece of landscape art presented the unexpected, and opened the possibility of a pause for the viewer to consider her assumed values and expectations about art and land.



Fungus landscape manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

My first cloth, *Soil*, was a material metaphor for the paradox of the proximal and distant that is interrogated by Nancy (2000) and Derrida (2005). With this paradox, that intense looking is a form of contact, simultaneously proximal and distant, I was inspired to bury the cloth as a form of landscape art that literally touched the land. Significantly, after I dug the cloth up, I left it as the earth had compressed it, and as I sewed, stapled, and wrapped it, I reinforced this idea of physical pressure of the earth on cloth. Metaphorically, under a Nancean influence, this landscape art referenced the philosophical pressure of touch on the formation of the subject. My thoughts about the importance and intensity of contact that occurs in the difference between one person and another, and the opportunities for learning within this curious lack of perceived space led me to compress this cloth, folding it in on itself, mimicking the cramped, buried place where I had left it.



Soil landscape manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

I aligned Peter von Tiesenhausen's placement of one cloth, *Water*, and his family's journey to Canada with Derrida's (2000) notion of hospitality so that the cloth became symbolic of our national inability to alleviate the collective fear of the absolute other. The ways that the silver wire cut into twisted cloth became metaphorical gestures of this limited, national sense of crippled hospitality. As I considered the multicultural classroom with this in mind, the urgency to

recognize the difficulty and necessity of living within difference, as Biesta (2001) has suggested, was greatly reinforced.



Water landscape manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

With Peter's second cloth, *Snow*, I noted his actions in placing the cloth marked an event whereby an inappropriate infringement on the environment inspired him to move his art from the site specific to the infraction to the placeless circulation of the justice system. This led me to examine the role of the artist as a social critic and the educational value for art education from such creative acts of resistance. In making this piece, I was continually drawn toward two opposing notions about snow that related metaphorically to art. I was tempted to cut the cloth up into pieces ever smaller and smaller as I wondered about the qualities of a mass of cloth flakes. However, I also recognized snow as avalanche, with its heavy, pervasive power and strength. As

I contemplated these opposing qualities within snow, I also considered the potential power toward greater social justice in numerous small, aesthetic acts of resistance. The anticipation for a multiplicity of so many singular, political acts of art to be socially powerful is one hope that I continue to hold. In the end, I created the art with both concepts in mind: flake and avalanche. Along with narrative and poem, there is potential in this piece of landscape art to act as an entryway for people to question their positions with regard to assumptions we hold about living in the land locally and globally.



Snow landscape manipulated by author

Four of the eight cloths were visible: both of Robert's cloths were visible, one was lying on the surface of his garden, and one was wrapped around the base of a tree; one of Pat's was partially burned; one of mine was tied to a tree. Through a comparison of two cloths related to wood, one of Robert Dmytruk and one of mine, I examined the power structure within public spaces, and the assumed comfort of one societal group – the white male position – over all others. I was reminded through my own privilege as a white teacher that I made similar, inaccurate assumptions about safety with regard to students and spaces in the school. Eventually my cloth became cotton knots, reminiscent of the way that I originally had tied the fabric around the tree, marking my safe space – my private property. Finally I cut the knots loose, so that they were singular, non-functioning ties, and I painted them as I would a watercolour painting. Thus, I rearranged and manipulated the shape of the painting surface, rupturing assumptions about space as it relates concretely to landscape art and metaphorically to power structures within communities. With this work, I contemplated the ability of art educators, among others, to value

painted, knotted cloth as they would a traditional landscape canvas. This would require an expansion of criteria that is valued in landscape painting to include such unfamiliar forms. Assuming that an image has potential over time to affect collective identity, accepting such painted knots as landscape art requires recognition of the limited sense of national identity that traditional landscape painting supports.



Wood landscape manipulated by author

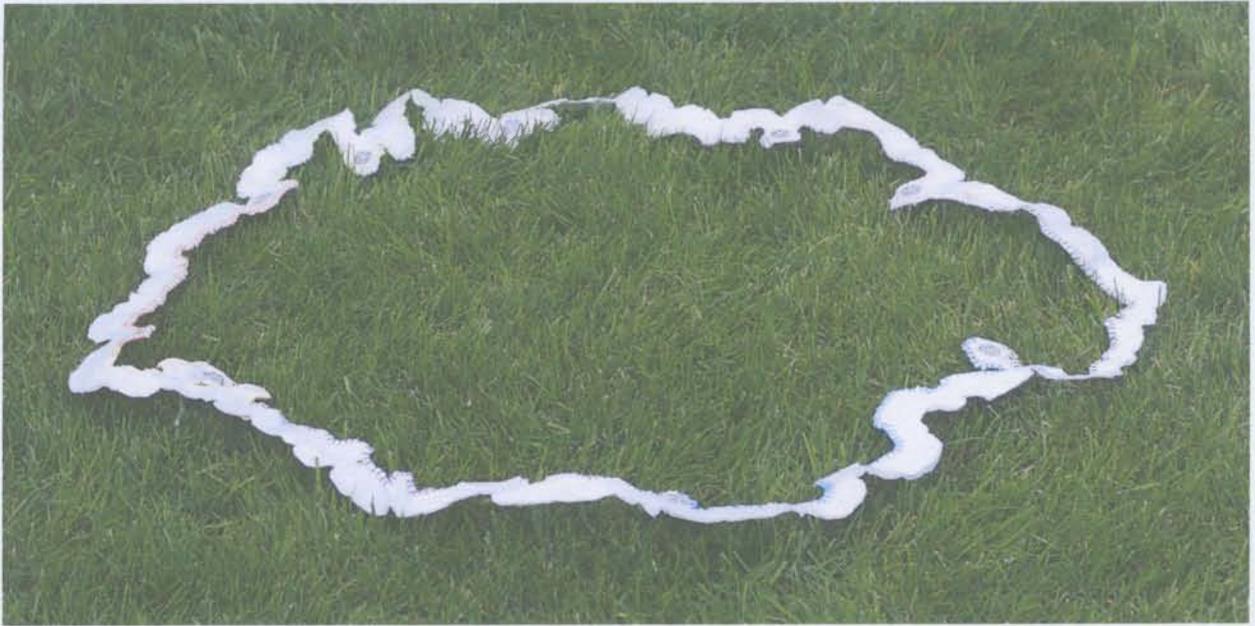
photo credit: Monica Emme

Robert's cloth was painted but left intact, as recognition of his interest in the marks made by the exposure to weather and the elements. I painted these lines, shapes and smudges deeper into the cloth. The space marked by this particular piece was representative of an enabling constraint (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Keeping this cloth intact seemed to suit this sense of security that is also often associated with home. In the end, both sections of fabric were about the ways we are manipulated by spaces while at the same time we manipulate them within every relationship: in school spaces, in "wilderness" spaces, in urban spaces, and most importantly, in the "between" spaces of one with another.



Wood landscape manipulated by author

Pat Beaton's cloth, *Fire*, was a performance piece, whereby she created a cloth campfire, and thus extended the wilderness myth to include assumptions about land use that are insinuated in the cultural norm of camping. This cloth was significant because its burned edge was a literal threshold. It inspired me to take Derrida's supplement, and the continual morphing of absence/presence in threshold as significant for education. The necessity of excess in schools so that social discourse within the places of living pedagogy, as suggested by Aoki (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005) have time and space to emerge, was reinforced in this burned edge.



Fire landscape manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

Finally, Robert's cloth, *Wind*, lay for six weeks on his frozen garden where the wind buffeted it endlessly. I traced this action of wind over cloth to the difference between it and a seemingly solid armature as I molded and forced the cloth into and against wire fencing. This tension was inspired, in part, by the translucent borders among scales of communities: in other words, the global, transitory nature of local and national identities that is characterized, in part, through the endless circulation of information and images. This porous nature of contemporary life with regard to space and place is often denied or disguised by nationalistic icons. I noted the ways artists utilize these different scales of community to disrupt and educate with regard to social injustice, often using the Internet to highlight local inequities.



Wind landscape manipulated by author

photo credit: Monica Emme

If I hover within this border of hidden and visible, always one occurring for the other to exist, this binary, along with presence/absence, distance/proximity, knowing/not knowing, land/artist, urban/rural, teacher/learner, and other dualities have been staging points from where I have moved into thresholds. Doing so reshaped this dichotomous, dialectic structure into multi-directional, organic flows. There exist various thresholds here, and I reference each through the others. This is the flow of thresholds: the randomness of this circulation, like all flows, tends to move toward openings. I thought of flows within this project frequently: the flows of the local, national, and global; the flows of public and private spaces; the flows of sense as becoming community; the flow of space, place, and time through visual culture, the body, and the landscape; the flow among metaphor, poem, and superlative; the flow of land, artist, and art; the flow of cloth; and ultimately, my initial inspiration and urgent desire to do this work, the flow of power among all other flows.

With these eight pieces of landscape art, and the various activities related to them, I interrogated two related areas: the nature of pedagogy inspired by the participants' creative processes; the critical ways that landscape art can question subjectivity and community, offering alternatives to the metaphor of wilderness nation that informs national identity; and the potential for landscape art practices to open opportunities for social transformation. I address each of these areas as connected threads within the fabric and written text of the document.

Stone shifts and land slides: Pedagogy inspired by artistic processes

As I have noted, these participating artists' creative processes inspire a pedagogical threshold between the known and unknown. One of the contributions of my aesthetic inquiry to the field of art education is in the positioning of a socially critical practice in landscape art as an example of this form of embodied learning through process. The significance for teacher educators rests within the understanding that this experiential, creative process has the potential to transform the ways they and their preservice teachers will share power within the educational institution. Through the a/r/tographical process, experienced differently by each teacher, the embeddedness of her position, relative to the dominant, neoliberal discourse can be examined with a focus on the land – a flashpoint of physical and imagined tension of community in this country. We need to understand our positions in the land to move into a pedagogical threshold with another position.

Each participating artist recognizes that meaning is created in the formation of the art and in reflection on it. Teachers need to understand and reinforce the process of/as learning that rests in the dynamic relationships we, as teachers and learners, experience together, investigating and reporting our new knowledge. In this way, the set learning objectives and paperwork of planning can become significant, living, tangential lines of learning. This kind of pedagogy as artistic gesture is situated and enfolded within uncertainty, and it is this uncertain space of the threshold that defines my artistic process, my teaching process, and my learning process. I am not alone. The participating artists indicated that they follow uncertain paths with the confidence that eventually there will be valuable experiences of learning. This trust comes from a myriad of sources: from past successes; from present relationships; from curiosity; from time taken to play.

I was reminded, through the artists' processes, and through my actions in the studio, of this obvious yet important point: to make art with my hands is a personal, embodied act of creativity that can be a powerful form of self reflection. However, when art leaves my hands and begins to randomly circulate in the world, creating meaning in various contexts, my embodied critiques, as art, have the potential to touch and teach others in various ways, because of this personal, imaginative quality.

Embodied and critical are not always found within the same description when it comes to educational research, but in this project these two attributes are joined. I hold that it is through personal, embodied, critical reflection and inquiry that art education as an institution can benefit.

It can gain from creative acts such as mine because it is at this personal level that our values - values that eventually govern our institutions - are formed and potentially reformed.

I say potentially because while I have declared the necessity of restructuring our values, particularly those surrounding the subject and community in the land, I admit that such intimate, identity-forming values are not easily changed. However, art that emphasizes this fact, and the fact that change of subject position is at the root of all social change and is necessary if we are to collectively live ethically and hospitably in the land. This kind of art is pedagogical. Some of the pieces that I have highlighted, such as Pat Beaton's "Fence Project", Peter von Tiesenhausen's "Lifeline" and his "Watchers", and my work with the cloths can become openings toward such transformations. The ways that Robert Dmytruk uses such art and artists in his classroom as a springboard not only to formally critique art, but also to critique society, is an example of how this kind of art can enter pedagogically into educational institutions. Thus, I suggest that art educators seek out art that disrupts, and could extend into the ontological realm so that opportunities to discuss the nature of being within the collective are possible. Many youth who sit in our classes are existentially questioning and forming their singular and collective perspectives about life in local, national, and global places, so this approach to art education is particularly relevant.

Another suggestion from my work for art educators is that they accept, or continue to accept the difficulty of diversity as learning potential within classes. While many art educators have commented and explored critical pedagogy with respect to art education, I wish to highlight the necessity, not only to discuss with students social injustice due to cultural misunderstandings within our larger, visual worlds, but also to examine ways to acknowledge the diversity evident within our classrooms. As I interviewed the participants about the nature of their educational and artistic practices, I was reminded of Biesta's (2001) claim that consensus can disable diversity and is not always a solution to difficulties within difference. In art classes, where diversity often is exposed and noticed because of the personal nature of art-making, this becomes particularly significant.

It is hoped that my and others' examples of a/r/tography and its more general relative, arts-based research, will continue to move into all areas of education as a process of inquiring into socially relevant issues. A/r/tography can, in its balance of material roots, philosophical rumination, and social critique, create lines of flight and flow through the architecture of binary structure and conceive education as emergent. There is great potential in this methodology where deeply held values concerning the art that one makes can be critiqued and shared so that all

educational stakeholders can reflect on their personal positions and those of others as they read and learn to “see” through the processes of making and viewing art.

Within an educational milieu attracted to linear models of learning and positivist outcomes, this aesthetic, pedagogical process of a/r/tography can be a difficult version of inquiry and education to accept. However, because of the critical aspect folded into this kind of personal awareness and imagining, researchers, teachers, and students may become sensitive thinkers and be able to better maneuver in their visual cultures knowing that significant learning and understanding is always negotiated in relationships. It is always situated in places. This potential makes this kind of aesthetic approach to learning that is a mark of this inquiry worth the extra time and energy that is often needed to dislodge familiar, institutional stones of education from their grounding. If we, as artists and art educators, shift one small stone by singularly supporting this aesthetic view of pedagogy, we can create a landslide of inquiry into the established values in education regarding teaching and learning.

ent from the tree or root, which plots a
tree on the Chomsky model still begins
stone chewing stone
omy. On the contrary, not every trait is
cold and smells like industry
linguistic feature. semiotic chains of
diverse modes of coding (biological, p
industry in my mouth
into play not only different regimes of
words tumbled and polished
ferring status. *Collective assemblages*
within *machinic assemblages*; it is not
between regimes of signs and their obje
stone
confine itself to what is explicit and to
bold and grating
guage, it is still in the sphere of a disc
assemblage and types of social power. C
I spit
gorical S symbol that dominates every
marker of power than a syntactic mark
stones heavy in my hand
correct sentences, you will divide each
verb phrase (first dichotomy . . .). Our
is not that they are too abstract but,
shining from my body
abstract enough, that they do not reach
a language to the semantic and pragma
tive assemblages of enunciation, to a
field. A rhizome connects established

Canada without bedrock: The shield of wilderness exposed

I have made landscape art in order to critique subjectivity and community. With each piece of cloth, I offer an alternative to the metaphor of wilderness nation that informs our national identity. I have used Nancy's "unworkable" community to "unwork" landscape art. These pieces of cloth do not look like landscape paintings. They are meant to disrupt the traditional field of landscape art and thereby also disrupt the connection of the neoliberal subject found specifically in the national identity of the wilderness myth that is so familiar within the Canadian canon of art, such as in the Group of Seven paintings. This disruption is important because in the context of a neocolonial nation intent on forgetting through romantic forays into non-existent wilderness, I would attempt to point out our cavalier attitudes toward each other and the land. In doing so, I consider the notion of an emergent national identity based upon thresholds among different forms of knowledge that have developed and continue to develop in society. This could create a tension against which the dominant idea of wilderness nation is critically engaged.

Through the *a/r/togographical* process, experienced differently by each teacher, the embeddedness of her position, relative to the dominant, neoliberal discourse can be examined through a focus on the land – a flashpoint of physical and imagined community in this country. We need to understand our personal and institutional biases concerning the land to move into a pedagogical threshold, a Nancean sharing with another position. I proceeded with this project from the major premise that art educators have a responsibility to engage their students with the work of critically aware, contemporary artists. This is a challenge for many of us within the field because our backgrounds and educations have been directed and influenced by a modernist, formalist approach within Western epistemology that values art primarily as self-expression and form. However, throughout my aesthetic narrative I have suggested that a critically informed art curriculum can expand this understanding of art to include a means by which we examine values that we tacitly hold and that greatly influence the formation of identity.

I sought such tension in my development of the cloth into art, informed by each participant's significant places, and influenced by Derrida's textual reversals so that the more powerful landscape artist representing the land was given lesser significance in the binary of land and artist. The land marked the pieces of fabric. I, as artist, followed through under the persuasion of these marks and further manipulated the sections of cloth. This departure from the traditional hierarchy of landscape artist representing the land afforded me an opportunity to "unwork" formal traditions of distance and illusion in landscape art. While the art that I have created is still

within the influence of western forms of knowledge that structure much current art practice, I did not, with this cotton, intend to replace the space and subject position reflected in traditional landscape painting with a sculptural form of cloth marked by the earth. It was not my intention that this art become the new norm. This would only reproduce the substantial subject position in a different form. Instead, my explorations offered an opening to think of our nationalism in ways other than primarily living in proximity to beautiful trees, lakes, mountains and so on. I do value this aspect of the land, but too much emphasis is placed upon this national model. How we name cultural artifacts works to define our collectivity. In this case, the unspoken values about the land are reinforced each time an art teacher presents wilderness paintings to her students and calls them national art (Whitelaw, 2007). As I have shown, she then supports the settler view of Canada in educational spaces. The ways that my art ruptures traditions of landscape art can serve as an inspirational metaphor for conceiving of alternative forms of collectivity.

What I am suggesting through this a/r/tographical narrative; this cloth marked by personal encounters and places, and then made into landscape art; this unknown territory into which I aesthetically delve, is that landscape art and the role it has in our current lives with regard to a sense of collective, national identity is changing and continues to change. Yet many art educators still consider the traditional, perspective-bound representation to be definitive of this genre. Nationalism, like all myth, must continually renew and reinvent itself if it is to be meaningful for the changing population. Art education needs to awaken to the important fact that landscape art has, in so many socially significant cases, left the canvas and returned to the land. Thus, it can serve as material threshold among social values, as we simultaneously live here together in this place, and here, in these global spaces. By considering national identity as an emergent, organic relationship with the local and the global, we may recognize through shared analyses of such images, and through the creation of new ones, that the threshold of who we are as Canadians and world citizens, and who we might become, is always immediate and touchable: always right now and right here. This suggests a commanding potential for agency and change. In this way, landscape art practices can create opportunities for social transformation.

Touchstone for art education: critique and change

These entwined research threads, pedagogy as artistic gesture and landscape art alternatives to the wilderness myth, involved a critique of the neoliberal subject position, thus opening the possibility for social change. I have noted that this subject position is manifest within educational institutions as objectives-based, formulaic curricula and within popular culture as a priori nationalism represented in wilderness icons. I have argued that social change must begin from a personal awareness of assumed values and that art can be an opening whereby we can begin to question these values. Socially attentive artists such as the participants in this study have combined personal expression with a comprehension that art is a politically powerful form of communication and commentary. From the participants' and my art, ideas, and gestures, I have examined some of our Eurocentric, national values concerning wilderness, highlighting the colonial residue that sticks to attitudes toward the land. All of these aspects of my work can be entryways for teacher educators to review what and how they teach the next generation of teachers.

Controversial, difficult topics centered on different points of view, such as use and ownership of land, are often made relevant in a forceful, affective register through personal, visual perspectives. The work of Peter von Tiesenhausen²², Robert Dmytruk²³, and Pat Beaton²⁴ is disseminated locally and globally in the ways that it is created and documented. The fact that these pieces of cloth became collaborations about the significance of place speaks to the ways that landscape art can refer to tangible, local and intangible, global sites that hold potential for social transformation. The way that the artist's personal testimony to social conditions ultimately circulates throughout the visual culture of various communities, local, national, and/or global creates this threshold between a singular gesture of art and a singular gesture of interpretation.

One strength of this project rests in my ability to take these pieces of cloth, places, and relationships with the participants and create an aesthetic inquiry that exposes the neoliberal assumptions within our wilderness identity, and to offer art within notions of a rearticulated community and subject under the influence of Nancy and Derrida. However, even as I wrapped wire tighter and tighter around twisted cloth, contemplating what the participants and I had made, I was aware of so many other artists, educators, and philosophers who also take up the issues surrounding the difficulty of living in contemporary uncertainty and collective diversity so that respect is maintained for difference and for the land. . I anticipate creating art from the ways that some of these thinkers such as Jacque Ranciere²⁵ and Alain Badiou²⁶ consider art as a pivotal

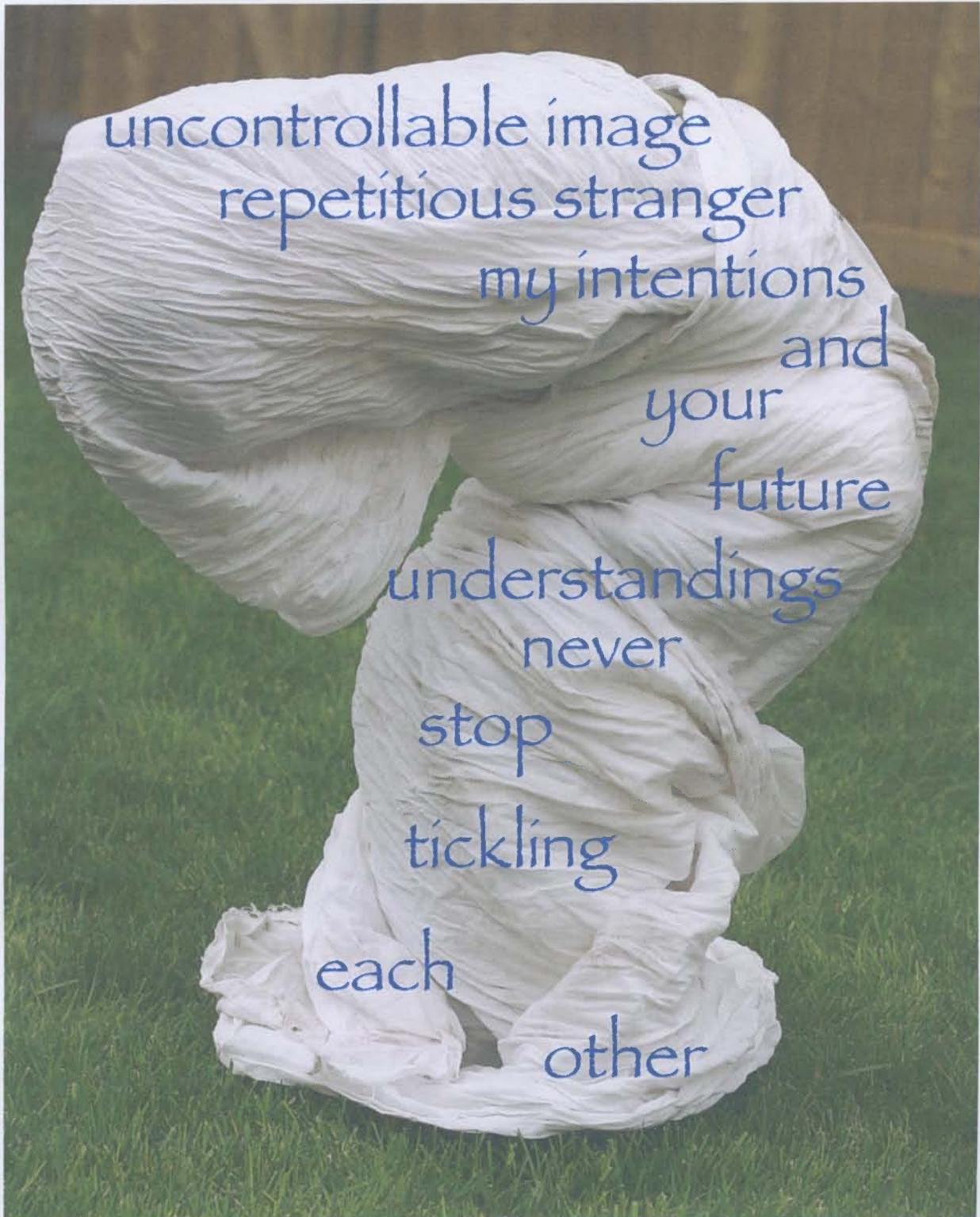
place from where social transformation can occur. I think of contemporary artists such as Rebecca Belmore²⁷, who works from within the Eurocentric institution of art to powerfully highlight injustices of neocolonialism entrenched within our current ways of living. Her work, and that of many other artists who value art as an important aspect of social commentary and potential inspiration for social change needs to be entertained within our schools. While important disruptions of our Eurocentric norms have occurred from within this position, in the writings of Nancy, Derrida, and Deleuze, and these have added to my art, as has the work of Beaton, von Tiesenhausen, and Dmytruk, I anticipate creating more landscape art in concert with so many others who are redefining landscape art as testimony to, and inspiration for the ways we actually and potentially live together in the land. What I sense at the heart of such political philosophy and art is a desire for a more just world.

As I end with such potential openings, I anticipate how I will introduce to a group of immigrant, preschool teachers the idea that landscape art could entail putting objects, cloth or otherwise, into the land: that there is power within landscape art to affect our ideas about nationalism. We will go on from there. I am curious about the landscape art we will make and the stories we will tell as an interrogation of what it means to be Canadian in this time and place. I think art educators might be surprised. I think the Group of Seven would be surprised. The expression of each story will be one fragment among many. These fragments mock the idea of the one.

Robert: One rock. It is surrounded by other rocks but it jumps out in the middle of nowhere at the edge of the sea.

Interview #3.

Coda



uncontrollable image
repetitious stranger
my intentions
and
your
future
understandings
never
stop
tickling
each
other

If I have a big envy in my life it's about painters. I wish I were a painter. What I'm fascinated with is the moment of truth. There's the canvas, it's on an easel - you got a brush - you got this goddamn palette of colours - and what do you do? What's that first move? I love that dangerous place.

Frank Gehry (In Pollack, 2006, film)

I have stretched a piece of watercolour paper. It is made of white cotton - one hundred percent rag. I run my hand over the smooth and bumpy surface of the cloth paper, anticipating the feeling of my thick, wash brush gliding over it. I have finished touching the lengths of cloth. I think I will paint a landscape. Again. Differently.

Notes

¹ René Descartes was a 17th century philosopher, scientist, and mathematician who is known for the much quoted phrase, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Western European traditions inherited from Cartesian philosophy include the rational, thinking subject who seeks a foundation of absolute truth. Descartes' work influences the ways we map and think about space using Cartesian co-ordinates. According to Descartes, the senses are limited and unreliable as knowledge and thus, logical deduction is to be valued over sensory perception. However, as my work suggests, there is more to investigate within the sensory, concrete, and corporeal realm. This is in keeping with more recent continental philosophy.

²I use neoliberalism to refer to the promotion of economic policies that support global capitalism, such as free trade, privatization, limited government intervention, and market determined exchange rates. Specifically, I connect the liberal subject position that is managerial in tone as the neoliberal subject. Noam Chomsky's (1999) book entitled, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* is critical of this position that increasingly has become the norm of a global society. Also see David Harvey's (2005/2007) book entitled, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and finally, Deborah Johnston's and Alfredo Saad-Filho's (2005) book called, *Neoliberalism: A critical reader*.

³ I refer to Jean-Luc Nancy's book, *An Inoperable Community*. A community that is unworkable or inoperable involves his critique of the neoliberal subject position. By "unworkable", he suggests that western society needs an alternative kind of community that does not rely on the *a priori* subject working to form a community based upon a shared need or want, but rather is based upon the notion of the subject as already in community by nature of existence – already exposed to another and becoming formed through personal encounters. This kind of singular encounter is multiplied into a plurality of such events and community is a side-effect, rather than a goal. For further explanation of this position see Nancy's (2000) book, *Being Singular Plural*.

⁴ This reference to running suggests action and a confident stride: a loping with the body in motion. These ideas for education help to keep us from stagnation on the simple yet profound level of metaphorical language. William Pinar's *currere* is the influence under which I take poetic liberty here.

⁵ In his article, "Reflection and its Resistances: Teacher Education as a Living Practice", Carson provides an overview of reflective practitioners within teacher education, such as Connelly & Clandinin, Van Manen, Britzman, Grimmett & Erickson, Clift, Houston, & Pugach, and Henderson. Carson makes the important point that there are many different kinds of reflective practice within education.

⁶ Sense refers to both the physical perception of the world through the senses and the creation of knowledge, as Nancy plays with the phrase, "to make sense". Sense is an important motif throughout Nancy's work, where he theorizes it as the material meaning making between one and another.

⁷ Robert Dmytruk was a recipient of the Prime Minister's Certificate of Achievement in 2006. For more information, go to < <http://www.pma-ppm.ca/epic/site/pmte-ppmee.nsf/en/wz01422e.html>>.

⁸ Malaspina Printmakers Society is an artist-run studio and gallery that has been in operation since 1975. For more information, check the website at the following address: <<http://www.malaspinaprintmakers.com/>>.

⁹ I am thinking of the book, *A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari. They theorize a combination of smooth and striated space as a metaphor for the nature of political shifts that happen between what these authors identify as nomadic and sedentary life. It is important to note that the smooth and the striated always occur together, creating assemblages that are mobile and continually emergent, where smooth articulates a nomadic force of change and striated represents a sedentary rigidity of thought.

¹⁰ Artists who traverse global, national, and local borders in their work are often concerned with issues of social justice. For examples of such artists, see Jan Jagodinski's citation of web artists in his article, "The question of community in the tradition of Western art: From Romanticism to the Internet", In B. Hipfl & T. Hug (Eds.), *Media Communities* (pp. 47-64). NY: Waxmann Münster.

¹¹ See Bill 112 (Chapter 21 Statutes of Ontario) An Act to Amend the McMichael Canadian Art Collection Act that was debated and passed in 2000. <http://www.ontla.on.ca/house-proceedings/transcripts/files_html/2000-09-25_L078.htm#P547_138021>. Also for a thoughtful commentary in support of the bill, read Kenneth Cavalier's article, "Case Notes: One premier's obsession? The McMichael Legislation in Ontario" in the *International Journal of Cultural Property*.

¹² William Pinar uses this term to name his method of curricular research. His choice of the term *currere*, a Latin transitive word meaning, "to run a course" suggests an active process of engagement with learning as the basis for curriculum. For a historical location of Pinar's method of *currere* within education see Douglas McKnight's (2006) article entitled, "The gift of a curriculum method: Beginning notes on William F. Pinar" in *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* 8(2), 171-183. Also see William Pinar and Madeline Grumet's (1976) book, *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, and Pinar et al., (1995) *Understanding Curriculum*.

¹³ In 1949, Ralph Tyler wrote a book entitled, *Basic principles of curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago University Press) that gave a model for a four-step curriculum that, according to McKnight (2006) is still in use today. Based on Franklin Bobbitt's (1924) writing, *How to Make a Curriculum*, Tyler's book was essentially an educational guide based solely on the Anglo-Saxon, protestant, middle-class position. Naturally, decades later we need to question the ways that we continue to based education on this potentially exclusionary model.

¹⁴ See Friedrich Nietzsche's writing, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A book for one and all*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁵ Immanent subject, referring also to immanence, as opposed to transcendence, suggests "the inside". In philosophy, the term refers to an internal position that contradicts the possibility of a religious or secular ideal of greater significance outside the self. Nancy creates the position of *transimmanence* whereby sense and meaning circulate in between the transcendent and the immanent.

¹⁶ See Jean-Luc Nancy's (2007) discussion of globalization and modalisation in his book, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*.

¹⁸ The de-centered subject is considered an important mark of the postmodern shift from the centrality of the Cartesian position that informs the neoliberal subject. Traditionally, the power to create meaning in the text (art) is centralized in the author (artist). The move toward the viewer (reader) to create meaning (contingent on the context of reception) in the text is the de-centering action referred to above. For more reading on this idea, see the seminal works, "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes and "What is an Author" by Michel Foucault. For information regarding the de-centering of the subject, see the work of the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies of the 1970's, 1980's and beyond. I do not refer to these authors in detail but cite the historical references, as the de-centered subject has been well established for many years in areas such as art, philosophy, and literature.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari use the metaphor of the rhizome to suggest an alternative to the hierarchy within the linearity of "progress" and dialectic thought. See their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* for a comparison in metaphor between the rhizome and assemblages of ideas, and the more unidirectional hierarchy within the structure of the taproot metaphorically representing linear processes of thought.

²⁰ Andrew Goldsworthy is a British artist who creates photographs of his site-specific sculptures. He uses natural objects to make his art and builds it on location in rural environments. For more information on Goldsworthy see these sites: <<http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/>> <<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/goldsworthyinfo.shtm>>

²¹ The term "anti-aesthetic" was made popular by Hal Foster in his edited book, *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. This important book includes remarks by artists and critics such as Jürgen Habermas, Kenneth Frampton, Fredric Jameson, Rosalind E. Krauss, Jean Baudrillard, Edward Said, and Craig Owens. The book centers on the 1980's debate of modernism and postmodernism surrounding the nature of art with regard to modernist connoisseurship and the avant-garde. I note it because it refers to the major shift in art from a focus on aesthetic formalism to conceptual issues. This debate seems very much alive in many current art education conversations but not so evident in curricula.

²² For more art of Peter von Tiesenhausen, visit his website at <<http://www.tiesenhausen.net/>>.

²³ See Robert Dmytruk's work at this gallery site: <<http://www.kensingtonfineart.com/artists.php?page=artist&id=46>>.

²⁴ See the video *Documenting Engagements*. This video is a collaborative effort of eight Vancouver artists documenting public art in the city. The Fence Project is a segment about the making of the fence from the point of view of the artist, Pat Beaton, who inspired others to commit to the project. There were eight separate videos produced to create the suite. All together they are titled, *Documenting Engagement: a Community Artists Media Institute*.

²⁵ Jacques Rancière (2007) wrote a book entitled, *The Future of the Image*, whereby he reinforces the connection he sees between art and politics. He is interested in contemporary status of images and their use and misuse in matters of egalitarianism.

²⁶ For more information regarding Badiou's position on art and its contemporary potential within social change, see his book titled, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Stanford University Press, 2005.

²⁷ Rebecca Belmore is a mid-career Canadian artist who is interested in social change. She was the national representative at the 2005 Venice Biennale where her video work evoked strong landscape resonance and was a powerful reminder of colonial violations of First Nations people. For this piece and her other work, see the Canada Council website:
<<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/news/releases/2004/sk127319685800468750.htm>>.
<http://www.ccca.ca/artists/artist_info.html?link_id=2002>.

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UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rita Irwin	DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Curriculum Studies	UBC BREB NUMBER: H05-81056
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution	Site	
UBC	Point Grey Site	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: N/A		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Patti V. Pente		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Internal UBC Grant - "A Sense of Place: Arts-based Inquiry into Artist/Teacher Practices"		
PROJECT TITLE: A Sense of Place: Arts-based Inquiry into Artist/Teacher Practices		
EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: January 30, 2008		
APPROVAL DATE: January 30, 2007		
The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:		